

WHAT DIDYMUS DID

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Did

by

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CHAPTER ONE

I

THE first time I met Tom Strawn I was mowing the small lawn in front of my cottage. It was the first hot spell of spring, and the perspiration was trickling down my face. I am not lazy, but I begrudged the time I was taking from the preparation of my thesis for an M.A. degree at Elysium College. I became aware of a young fellow standing on the sidewalk watching me, and as I passed him, making the grass fly, he inquired: "Sir, could I do your garden work? I will do it good and save you all the trouble."

I stopped the whirring machine. Common sense would have directed me to say, "No, thank you," but instead I inquired, "What would you charge?" The answer was, "Seventy-five cents an hour." Somewhere in the back of my mind went on a lightning calculation as to the amount of time I could save and what it might be worth to my future. I am a teacher in our local high school and am forced to be careful, there being a Tax-payers' Association which opposes the adjusting of our salaries to the rise in the cost of living.

I looked at the young man. I call him that because he appeared to be fully grown, but I learned that he was only eighteen. He was well-made, with a brick-red complexion and sandy hair having a tendency to wave; I guessed at Scottish ancestry, by way of the Ozark mountains. He told me his name and that he lived on the far side of the railroad tracks; his father was a disabled railroad man and he had younger brothers and sisters. He had quit school some time ago and was helping to keep the family going. He liked gardening and would take care of everything on my place; I would never have to tell him anything but once. He said this with a friendly smile, and I liked him. I took a sudden resolution in favour of my thesis, and let go of the lawnmower handles right there. I took Tom and showed him the place, with its attempt at a garden in the back and little side strips where flowers were supposed to grow, but the weeds were so much more persistent.

I found that I had made a good decision. Tom Strawn came once a week and worked quickly and did everything he had agreed to. The three dollars I paid him were honestly earned and a good bargain for me. I discovered that he was very ignorant and frequently un-

kind to the king's English, but I made no attempt to educate him; I had enough of that at school, with four classes crowded and a great quantity of homework. I made it a rule to avoid personal and social contacts with my young people. I had a firm resolve not to remain a high-school teacher; I would save every minute of my time for my thesis on "The Sources of the New Testament Apocrypha."

But of course I couldn't avoid a brief chat with Tom now and then. I learned that he was a "back-to-nature" enthusiast. He always did his garden work stripped to the waist. He had a fine, muscular torso, and I suspected that he was proud of it. It presented an alarming, red spectacle, and I felt it my duty to warn him against sunburn, but he assured me that he was used to it; all it did was to bring out a perfectly incredible spread of freckles. He liked to whistle while he worked, and as he came on Saturdays I had to ask him not to do that. He assented cheerfully, and when he started he would remember and stop suddenly.

2

I should explain that I live alone in my cottage. My mother died and left it to me, with not much else. I know a couple of young ladies in the town, either of whom I believe would come and share the cottage, but I have not invited them because I am determined to get first an M.A. and then a Ph.D. I have books sent me from the state library, paying the postage out of my small salary, and when the package comes I open it

eagerly and begrudge every moment that I give to anything else.

I had come to realize that my young gardener had a great deal of respect for me as a learned person. So when, after several months of good service, he came to me and asked for help I couldn't turn my back on him. I heard footsteps on my porch one evening, and when I opened the door, there he was, saying shyly, "Mr. Amytage, I need some advice. I need it awful bad."

I invited him to come in and sit down. He had no hat and his forehead was red and freckled up to the roots of his sandy locks. He sat on the edge of his chair, leaning forward with his knees drawn tightly together and his two big hands clasped over his thighs. He gazed at me with a most earnest expression and didn't seem to know how to get started.

"Well, Tom, what is it?"

He answered, "I don't know what to make of it, Mr. Amytage; I have saw an angel."

I wasn't prepared for anything as serious as that, and couldn't think of what to say except, "Indeed, Tom?"

"Yes, sir," he went on; "in the woodshed." He looked so very earnest, so worried, that I had to take him seriously.

"Are you religious?" I inquired.

His answer surprised me. "My Grand-dad was a strict Presbyterian, but he used to larrup my Dad, and my Dad hated it all. He give me a book to read by a man named Paine; it is called *The Age of Reason* and that's about what I believe."

"Then you are an eighteenth-century deist," I answered. "But tell me about this angel."

"I went out into the woodshed. I was a-goin' to fix a

chair. I looked up and there was a man in a white robe, but he was sorta thin-like; you could see the woodshed through him, and I have never saw nothing like that. My knees begun to shake and my teeth was hitting each other. Then he spoke, "Thomas, you have been chose!" "

"And what did you say?"

"I said, 'What for, sir?' And he said: 'There is too many wars and they are gettin' out of control and you must end them.' Of course I didn't know what to say to that, I just said dumblike, '*Me*, sir?' Then he says, 'You, Thomas Strawn. Anything that you order will be done.' Just like that, and of course I said, still dumb-like, '*Any*-thing?' And he said: 'Anything provided that *They* approve.' And that was all, sir. He jest wasn't there no more. I don't mean he walked away, he was jest gone."

"You didn't have a chance to ask him who *They* were?"

"I didn't have time to think, sir. I went sorta weak and had to sit down for a while. Then I didn't know what to do. I didn't know what it meant to be chose, and I didn't know what I was supposed to do. I thought maybe I had been wicked to decide there wasn't no such things as angels and maybe one had come to learn me better. Or I thought maybe I had gone crazy—I didn't know what. Then I decided it couldn't do no harm to try. I had been ordered to order something, and the only way I could find out was to do it. So I thought what my Dad wanted more than anything else in the world was a TV set so that he could set and watch what was goin' on. I was sure *They* couldn't think it was bad for me to want something for my Dad, so I thought, 'I want it.' Then I thought, I better say it out loud, because the angel said it out loud. I said, in a sorta scared

voice, 'I order a TV set.' I thought I ought to try it louder so I half-shouted, 'I order a TV set.' I looked around to see if one would appear, the same way as the angel appeared, but I didn't see nothin' at all.

"I set and thought, maybe I'd better come and tell you. But I decided I wouldn't talk about it, because people would think I was crazy. I would jst wait and see what happened.

"I was still settin' when all of a sudden I hear a screech, and here comes Mom runnin' and says there is an expressman out front, and he says there's a TV set for Dad. So I got up and come to see, and there was the expressman and he says, 'Is the name Strawn? Is the number 1472 South Jefferson Street?' That is right, and that is all he knows about it; he says some one has sent a TV set, all packed up in a big box and the aerial wrapped separate and sewed up in canvas. Of course I can't tell him that an angel sent it; I just said 'All right, leave it,' and he left it. And gosh, there is the whole family half-crazy with delight and not knowing what to make of it. I would of liked to say, 'I order that this TV set be set up,' but of course that would have give the secret away. I jst went and paid a man to put it up. So theré is Dad settin' in the house, and all the kids crazy lookin' their eyes out."

3

I asked my visitor what else had happened, and he told me he had gone for a walk to think out the problem, and at a street intersection he had observed a car which

apparently was in trouble. He went and discovered that it was being driven by a nice-looking young lady. He told me, "I pushed the car out of the crossing and she steered it to the curb. Then I looked under the hood, but I didn't know much. I thought that was a good time for a try-out, so I said in a low voice, 'I order that the car be fixed.' I heard a click, and I said to the young lady, 'Now try it.' She did, and the car started all right, and she asked what was the trouble. I didn't know what to say so I told her, 'I think the doodle needed ad-justin',' and she went off quite contented. She was right pretty and I was sorry to see her go."

"So you learned that you don't have to say it loud. Perhaps you don't have to speak it at all."

"No. I tried just thinkin' it, but that didn't work." Then after a pause: "I came to you, Mr. Amytage, because I don't know what to make of it or what to do."

"I'm afraid I can't give you much advice, Tom," I answered. "I don't know what to make of it either."

"Tell me, do you believe there is angels?"

"The fact is, it never occurred to me to take the idea seriously."

"But you see there is some—at least there's one. Why do you suppose he come after a poor ignerant feller like me?"

"Well, this is the age of democracy, and perhaps that idea has reached the angels. He wants to hear the voice of the plain people."

"Well, I am sure plain enough. Here I was expectin' to be took into the army in a year or two, and now I'm told to stop the world wars. What am I goin' to say?"

"It would be easy enough to give an order to stop the

wars," I replied, "and what harm could it do to try and see if it is obeyed?"

The brick-red face lighted up still brighter. "You tell me what to say, Mr. Amytage."

I thought it over. "First—you mustn't have your feelings hurt—if you are going to give orders to this world or any other, you ought to have your language improved. I've been thinking for some time of suggesting that you should attend night school."

"I know I'm ignerant," he said, "but I had the idee maybe they could fix it up. How about me giving an order for that?"

"Fine!" I said. "It surely can't do any harm."

So my blond young gardener assumed a military voice and commanded, "I order for me to talk good grammar."

There was a silence. Apparently he was afraid to open his mouth again, and I had to tell him we could never know unless he made a test. "I feel quite certain that it will be all right," he said. "They are bound to realize that I have to speak correctly if I want to make any impression on my auditors."

"I think they have realized it already," I replied, and would have smiled if it had not been such a serious occasion.

"Now this here"—and he checked himself. "I mean this world war that is threatened—what do you think should be done about it?"

"I have been telling people that the only thing that could be done is for the Russians to give up their determination to impose their system upon the world."

"How would we know if that was being obeyed, Mr. Amytage?"

"Well, I suppose the Politburo would find a way to let us know."

"What is that Politburo, please?"

"It's the group of men who are ruling Russia and are planning to impose their system upon the rest of the world by methods of force and terror."

"Well then, don't you think I ought to give them a regular order?"

I thought that might be worth trying; so once more my visitor raised his voice. "I order the Politburo to cease trying to impose its system upon the rest of the world by methods of force and terror."

"You might order them to cease sending military supplies to Red China and order that country to make peace with the United Nations in Korea. You might give an explicit order for the Politburo to proclaim these policies to the world within the next twenty-four hours. So we won't have to wait long to see what is going to happen." And once more Tom turned my suggestion into a command.

4

We spent the evening discussing all the aspects of this unique problem. My visitor wanted to know what I supposed the angel meant when he said "*They*," and I told him, "As a rule the angels have spoken for God; but, of course, there might be intermediate powers, and it's by no means certain that their influence would extend to the Politburo. We can only wait and hope for the best."

"At first I was scared stiff," said Tom. "But then I thought it over and made up my mind that he was a

good angel and didn't mean me any harm. Of course I am going to do what I can to please him. I'd like to give him one more order right away, Mr. Amytage."

"And what is that?"

Instead of telling me he spoke with his newly-found firmness of voice: "I order that Mr. Amytage will give up his position and become my advisor."

"Oh, no, Tom," I exclaimed, "I couldn't do that!"

"Why not?"

"I have two academic degrees that I must get. I have my living to earn."

"Isn't it reasonable to assume that if these powers are willing to provide a TV set free of charge, they will provide money enough for you while you help me do their work?"

"I don't know what to say to that, Tom——"

"You don't have to say anything. We'll find out."

And again a military command: "I order that five hundred-dollar bills be put in Mr. Amytage's inside coat pocket."

Instinctively I thrust my hand to that spot, and you can imagine my state of mind when I felt the bills. I could tell what they were by the shape and smoothness even before I took them out and stared at them. Tom was staring too. When I said it was a miracle, he said it was five of them. Later I told him it was what the psychic rescarchers call an apport. I had never taken the idea seriously, and certainly had never expected to witness it in and on my person.

"Well, you see what it means," persisted Tom. "It means that you are to do what you are told."

"But listen," I argued, "I admit that five hundred dollars is a lot of money for a teacher in these days of

inflation. But you must realize that I have a life career to think about. I have to have a salary coming right along, and if I should give up my position in the middle of the term and give up my effort to get my degrees, and then your angel should change his mind, where would I be?"

"That seems reasonable enough, and I am sure the angel will appreciate it. I was told to give orders, and I wasn't told what orders to give, so apparently it's up to me. I order that a thousand dollar bill shall appear in your inside coat pocket."

Once more I thrust my hand in and there was a bill such as I knew about only from fiction and the movies. It had on it a portrait of the stern-faced President Grover Cleveland, the man who had said "It is a condition which confronts us, and not a theory"—and surely that statement applied to me at this moment. I had witnessed six miracles!

"I don't know what to say," I began: but my gardener, with his new firmness of mind, told me. "You have to say yes, Mr. Amytage, because I just can't do this thing alone. I'll be sorry if I have to put it into an order, but if I do, why then your mind will be changed whether you want it or not."

"Listen, Tom," I pleaded, "be reasonable. We've done an awful lot already—if it works. I mean, if the Politburo obeys you, you have changed the future of the human race. So why not wait twenty-four hours and see how it works out? You think up your ideas, and I'll think up mine; I'll listen to my radio, and you listen to your new television set, and we'll see what comes out of Moscow. It may be that you have already accomplished your purpose, and if so, you won't need me or anybody

else. It might even be that *They* will shut off the power."

"It could happen," said this canny grandson of Scotland. "Oughtn't we use it while it's working and get a bit more money?"

"Well," I suggested, "We must bear in mind that this power, whatever it is, is not a mechanical thing; it hears and understands. So there is a moral element involved. Don't you think the wise thing might be for you to order that you shall gain in wisdom and judgment, so as to be better able to carry out the grave duty which has been assigned you? It may well be that you have more power than any other man in the world, and you cannot afford to make too many mistakes."

This sobered the young commissioner of heaven or whatever. The Scots are a pious people as well as a canny one. He repeated my words, which sounded like a prayer, or an answer to one. But when we shook hands in parting he added, "Put that money out of sight, Mr. Amytage. If there are angels, there may also be devils, and we don't want to let it fall into bad hands."

CHAPTER TWO

I

I REALLY couldn't have gone on with my classes next morning; I couldn't have kept my mind upon the work. I called up my principal and told him I was detained by an important business matter. I knew who my substitute would be, an elderly gent who would be glad to earn a few dollars; so I would be causing no great inconvenience. I listened to the radio with more interest than I was willing to admit to myself. Obviously it was perfectly preposterous that a command issued in the small California town of Elysium could have had

any effect upon the all-powerful Politburo in the Kremlin. It was utterly inconceivable; yet also it was inconceivable that a command could have brought into existence a fully-packed television set and an express-man to deliver it. Where the devil had they come from?

I listened to the news that a representative of the Soviet Union arriving in New York for a United Nations meeting had given an interview explaining that his government was all for peace and had never planned or thought of any act of aggression. It was the usual "baloney"; the Soviet Union was all for peace while preparing for war with the labour of a hundred million over-driven serfs. I could feel quite certain that the Soviet representative had received this directive long before my gardener had issued his.

Later in the morning I went for a walk and entered the bank where I kept my inconsequential account. I spoke to my friend Stanley, son of the bank's president. Stan and I had been through high school together and had been on the tennis team. He lived in a mansion up on the hill slopes and I had never been invited there; but sometimes on a Saturday afternoon or Sunday morning he would call and take me to the country club for tennis.

I told him I wanted to speak to him privately and he took me into a room. There I produced my six United States treasury notes. I told him I had found them in my home, which was true. I said I didn't know how they got there, and that also was true. The idea had occurred to me that maybe the notes might be counterfeit and I wanted to make sure before I offered them for deposit.

Stan looked at them curiously, and obviously would

have been glad to hear more about the matter, but I had no more to say. He called in the cashier, who got a magnifying glass and studied the notes one by one. He said they looked all right to him. I replied, "This is a lot of money for me, Stan. I want to deposit it, but I'd be afraid to draw any until I make sure."

"We'll see what the old man says," he remarked, and went and got his father, a large, rotund gentleman with a cordial manner for all his depositors, however small. He called me "Professor," and if there was a slight touch of "kidding" in the title I had no basis for complaint, for I was young. He took his turn with the magnifying glass, and then said, "If you are worried about them, we'll send them by registered mail to the Subtreasury. They'll know for sure, and if the stuff is OK they'll send us a cheque. Of course, if there's anything queer about the notes you'll never see them again."

I said I was prepared for that, and he told Stan to give me a receipt for the notes, accepted not for deposit but for investigation. I insisted on paying the registry fee; for when I am dealing with people who are trying not to consider themselves my social superiors I help them along by not accepting any favours.

2

When Tom came in the evening I told him what I had done. He was surprised at the idea that the money might not be genuine. "I've been spending it right along," he said. I asked him, "In large bills?" And he

told me that he couldn't do that without attracting attention; he was making the practice of ordering five dollars at a time. I asked him if he went into the woodshed to order it, and he said it made no difference where he was, the money always appeared in his pocket. "My coat is buttoned up," he said, "it must come right through the cloth."

"It appears to be a process of interstitial osmosis," I remarked, and he was impressed by that phrase and asked me to repeat it. "I may find it useful sometime," he said. Then he added, with a smile, that he was ill at ease with his family because he had to remember to talk the way they had always heard him talk. "I am fixing it up so I can change gradually," he explained. "I have told them that you are helping me with my education. That is true, you know. You have been helping me ever since I first met you."

He was displaying a shrewdness which impressed me. He had decided not to say a word to any member of his family about the angel's visit. "They couldn't help but talk about it," he explained, "and they would start wanting things right away. At present they are perfectly happy with the TV set, but if they knew I could get all the money I want, they would want a car, and the children would have to have bicycles, and new clothes for everybody, and God knows what next. I don't know what I am supposed to do with this gift, but I'm sure it is not to set my family up in style and marry the children off to the nobles."

What was he supposed to do? Apparently it wasn't to bring about an end to the "cold war," for we listened to another radio programme and there was nothing said about any concessions on behalf of peace by the Soviet

government. "We shall have to proceed by the process of elimination," I said.

He told me of a new incident. "I was walking along the street and a car passed. I said, I will see what I can do to a car, and I ordered it to stop. It stopped right in the middle of the street, and the driver must have been puzzled. Then I said, 'The car may go on now,' and it started. Do you suppose it was interstitial osmosis that set the brakes?"

"I don't know," I replied. "Apparently you can do what you like with anything nearby. That is a dangerous power, Tom, and you will have to be careful how you use it. You will have to be a man of conscience."

"That's what I've been telling myself. I don't want to go through the world playing tricks, I want to have some purpose in what I do." I was glad to hear those words, and told him so.

3

I gave all my time to thinking about this problem. There was a way in which it appeared to concern me especially, and for a while I debated whether to take Tom into my confidence. Finally I told him, "I've been wondering whether I may not have been the cause of the angel's coming to you. I believe I told you sometime ago that I was writing a thesis in order to earn the degree of Master of Arts."

"You told me, Mr. Amytage, but I was so dumb I didn't know what it meant."

"I am required to write a paper about some historical or literary subject. It has to involve research and

thought, and, of course, to be reasonably well written. A professor at the college has charge of my work and has to approve the theme I wish to write on and to guide me in my work. I can take as long as I need, but now and then I have to present my results and satisfy him that I'm making progress. When my paper is completed, he reads it, and if he is satisfied he approves it and recommends me for the degree. When I have it I am supposed to have proved my competence as a teacher, and I get promoted and get a higher salary."

"I understand all that," said Tom, "and truly I'll be sorry if I interfere with your career."

"I am not trying to beg off, I'm leading up to something very curious. I chose as my subject 'The Sources of the New Testament Apocrypha.' Those are writings which purport to come down from the time of the apostles of Jesus. But the Church authorities have rejected them as being inventions; that is what the word Apocrypha means. As it happens, one of the works I have been studying deals with the life story of Saint Thomas, one of the original twelve. You have perhaps heard the phrase 'doubting Thomas.' The story in the New Testament is that when he heard about the resurrection of Jesus he refused to believe it. He said he would believe it only if he could see the nail holes in Jesus' hands and thrust his fingers into the wound in his side. Then Jesus appeared and told him to do these things and to believe."

"My grandfather told me that story," said Tom. "He used to bring it up to my father, who is also named Thomas, and who began to imperil his soul by reading infidel books. I remember hearing arguments about it when I was a little fellow."

"The manuscript I am telling you about was originally written in the Syriac language—Syria being the country just north of Palestine. The name Thomas comes from the Syriac word meaning twin, and according to this old manuscript Thomas was a twin of Jesus. But of course we don't have to believe that because the manuscripts are apocryphal. They were translated into Greek, and then the name was changed to the Greek word for twin."

My gardener held up his hand suddenly. "Wait, Mr. Amytage," he said, "let's make a test." And he issued the command. "I wish to know the Greek word for my name." And then, almost instantly, he added, "Didymos."

I had been staggered several times already, and now it happened again. "I'om," I exclaimed, "that is really extraordinary! Are you sure you have never looked into my manuscript?"

"Gosh, Mr. Amytage, you know I was never in your house alone, and I would never have dreamed of looking at one of your manuscripts. I was too ignorant to know what it was all about."

"Well, that is the word, Didymos. From the Greek it was translated into Latin, and then it was spelled with a 'u.' In the New Testament we read about 'Thomas, called Didymus.' The apocryphal book is *Acta Thomae*—meaning the Acts of Thomas. Of course in writing a dignified master's thesis I'm not supposed to have a sense of humour, but to myself I have been calling it 'What Didymus Did.' "

Usually Tom was ready for a little fun, but not now. He was gazing at me intently. "I ought to know about him, Mr. Amytage. Please tell me."

4

Nothing pleases a man more than to have someone ask about his occupation in life. It is called "talking shop", but I am sure Tom would never have thought of applying the phrase to academic studies. I told him the legend from the manuscripts, which date from the third century; how, after the death of Jesus, the apostles drew lots to see what their destinations should be, and it fell to Thomas to travel to India. He knew that was a far off country, and what he had heard about it alarmed him. He said he wouldn't go. But the Lord appeared to him and said, "Be not afraid. Go to India and proclaim the word." Thomas replied, stubbornly, "Whither thou would'st send me, send me, but elsewhere; because to the Indians I will not go."

I saw that my ex-gardener was startled; his blue eyes appeared to have widened. "You understand," I hastened to say, "you don't have to believe a bit of this."

"Yes, sir," he replied, "but why shouldn't I? Do you suppose that could have been the Lord that came and spoke to me?"

"I don't know, Tom. How could I?"

"If it was the Lord, why wouldn't He tell me?"

"Well, I know that the ancient Jews were forbidden ever to speak the name of their Yahweh, or Jehovah, as we call him. They believed they would be annihilated if they did; and maybe you would have been annihilated just by hearing His name."

"Go on and tell me the rest of it, please." I recognized by the tone a greatly sobered grandson of Scotland.

"Well, of course there is no use talking to the Lord like that. Even while Thomas, called Didymus, was speaking, there appeared as if by magic a merchant named Abbanes from India. He reported that a king, Gundaphar, wanted a carpenter, and Didymus was a carpenter. So the Lord sold him to Abbanes for 'three litrac of silver unstamped,' which was a lot of money in those days; Didymus must have been a good carpenter. You understand that slavery was taken for granted in that time. When you were sold you had to follow your owner, even to the end of the earth. A rebellious slave would be tortured and killed."

"You don't believe any of this really happened, Mr. Amytage?"

"Modern scholars are apt to be over-suspicious. They point out that there was a historical king known to the Greeks as Gondophores, but he ruled over Parthia, a country south of the Caspian Sea. Most of the names in the *Acta* are from Mesopotamia, and that, too, is a long way off. The heroine of one of the tales is named Mygdonia, which was a river flowing into the Black Sea. But all this doesn't really matter when we are dealing with heavenly affairs; all earthy distances are unimportant in comparison. Our astronomers have recently begun work with a telescope which photographs light from galaxies a billion light years away. Expressed in miles, that requires the figure six followed by twenty-one ciphers; and still they have not been able to catch a glimpse of heaven. Compared with such distances, a parallax based upon one or two thousand miles would be hard to observe."

5

But Tom Strawn didn't want to hear me show off my knowledge of astronomy. He wanted to hear about that ancient bearer of his name who had been called a twin of Jesus. So I recited how Abbanes took his slave by sea and came to a city named Andrapolis. Its king was getting his daughter married, which was an important occasion; the town was having a celebration. The travellers were welcomed, but a servant was rude to the apostle and struck him; whereupon the apostle told the man that the hand which had struck the blow would be "dragged by a dog."

"What did he mean by that?" asked my auditor, eager as a child; and I told him how the man went to the well to draw some water, and a lion attacked him and tore him to pieces. A black dog seized one arm and dragged it into the hall where the wedding feast was being celebrated. This, I discovered, disturbed the moral feelings of a well-brought-up young Scotch-American. We were supposed to believe that the apostles went out as messengers of love and mercy, and it seemed a shocking thing to condemn a man to such a fate. I realized what was in Tom's mind—he, too, was to be a worker of miracles, and was thinking how he was going to behave and what was likely to happen to him.

I pointed out the distinction which I had drawn in my academic thesis. The apostle had not condemned the man to a dreadful fate; apparently he had been clairvoyant, foreseeing what was going to happen. It might

even have been that he was warning the man, and that the man scoffed at the warning. Anyhow, there happened to be a Hebrew flute girl who heard the apostle's prophecy. She told others at the court about it, so everybody knew it was a miracle. As a result, they all became converted to the religion which Didymus had been sent to spread.

"You see," I went on to explain, "how curiously this story fits in with what has happened to you. I am wondering if that might not be the reason why the angel picked you as the person to visit. He would know, of course, that you were working for me, and that I would put you in touch with all this. You were a new-time 'doubting Thomas', and you had been reading yet another Thomas Paine, and sharing his dreaded rationalism."

"You have the answer!" was my young friend's comment.

6

He had to hear every detail of that ancient legend and he would not be sidetracked. I told him how Didymus had continued his travels, having heaven on his side, and all the powers of hell could not prevail against him. So we have to forgive him if he became a bit extravagant in the use of this strange endowment.

"After all," I said, "he hadn't wanted to come to India, and perhaps had the idea to work quickly and get the job over with. In the town of Palur he had trouble because it was inhabited by the Nambutiri

Brahmins, who are even today high-caste and very stiff in the necks. They had strange customs which must have been incomprehensible to a Hebrew. They practised polyandry, one woman being married to several men. And even now, when a son is born to a family, the father pretends to die; a ritual funeral service is held for him. They have long heads and straight thin noses and fine wavy hair—that also is not according to the Hebrew.”

“What happened?” persisted Tom.

“Well, when Didymus came upon them, they were having their ritual morning bath at a tank in the temple. They threw handfuls of water into the air and every drop of the water was supposed to turn into a prayer. Thomas told them that this was nonsense, and naturally they did not take kindly to his remarks. He offered to show them what could be done to water with real prayers, and they consented to watch. He prayed in his fashion, and when he dipped out water from the tank there remained a hole in the water, and that which he threw into the air floated in big lumps and presently turned into beautiful flowers and fell back into the pool. Of course the most stiff-necked Nambutiri agreed that this was a better miracle than anything they could do, so they erected a cross at the spot and the temple was turned into the First Orthodox Syrian Church of Malabar.”

“And then what, Mr. Amytage?”

“Well, of course, by deeds such as this it was easy to spread a faith. Didymus overcame a dragon, and slew a talking colt, and a devil which had taken possession of a woman; also he brought back life to a dead girl. By such means he caused his religion to prevail over the

entire Malabar coast, the South-western part of India. Fifteen centuries passed before we have another record, but then a historian reported that the Christians had become the ruling caste of this district and were very wealthy. Their young men were trained to arms from boyhood and were the most valued soldiers of the king. The Christians always carried guns and spears and were obeyed without question by all the lower castes. Of course we may doubt that that was what the travelling Hebrew carpenter had planned to bring about."

The new miracle man was not to be diverted from his theme. "Have you told me everything he did?"

"There are many old manuscripts telling about his wonders. There is a charming story about King Gundaphar whom they had come to visit. He was impressed by the carpenter and gave him a treasure, telling him to build a new royal palace. The king must have been careless about his financial affairs, for he didn't follow up the work, and Thomas never even started the palace. He used up all the money doing good works, helping the poor and healing the sick. That went on for some time and then the king found out about it, and he was furious. He threw the apostle Didymus into jail. The jails in those days must have been very uncomfortable, but Didymus stuck it out because he had been told that his enemies would never be able to harm him. What happened was that the king's brother died and was taken up to heaven. He was shown all the wonders of that place, and his attention was attracted to one especially beautiful palace. He asked about that, and was told it was the palace which Didymus had built for King Gundaphar in heaven. So then the brother understood what Didymus had been doing and begged to go

back to earth to tell the king about it. He was allowed to go; and then Didymus was let out of jail, and the king and all his court and his people accepted the new religion of love and mercy. That, I think, is a first-class story, and it's too bad it didn't really happen."

I was surprised by the reaction of my pupil. "But how can you be sure it didn't happen?" he exclaimed.

"I thought you were sceptical about religious matters, Tom."

"So I was, and so was the old Thomas, the doubting one. But he saw the proofs and he had to become a believer. And now the same thing has happened to me. How can I doubt what I have seen? How can you doubt it?"

I had to confess: "I guess it's because I haven't quite been able to persuade myself that I saw it."

It was as if there was a fire in those bright red cheeks and a light in those blue eyes. "I have seen it!" he exclaimed. "And it's all quite clear to me now. I tried politics, but I didn't get any answer, and I'm not meant to have anything to do with politics. I was sent to you because you were writing about the old Didymus, who would show me the way! I can do miracles, and I am to convert people and lead them to a better life."

"Listen, Tom," I said, solemnly. "We have been told that an evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign."

"All right, Mr. Amytage! They seek a sign, and I will give it to them! What kind of generation have we got? Look at our young people; talk about adultery, you don't know the half of what they are doing. I have seen them, and I know. Taking dope, gambling, getting drunk and smashing up cars, holding up liquor stores

and super-markets, going into the hills for orgies during weekends—there has never been anything like it. Look in the drugstores and see the kind of literature they are reading; the naked women and the murders on the covers!”

“I don’t doubt any of it, Tom,” I replied, still more gravely. “But I had no idea you would turn into a reformer.”

“I had no idea of it either. But here I am, and I have been given orders. What else can I do?”

7

I was impressed by the seriousness which my gardener had developed, and by the reach of his mind. It seemed to be growing by leaps and bounds; to me it was a miracle, almost as impressive as the sudden discovery of United States treasury notes in my inside coat pocket. I kept wondering how much of this was the activity of his own mind, and how much the work of those powers whom he called “*They*”.

“Mr. Amytagc,” he declared, “I want to know all there is to know about religion.”

“That is a tremendous order, Tom. Whole libraries have been written about each of the religions.”

“Are there more than one?” he asked, naively. I told him there were scores and had perhaps been hundreds. He asked, “Where can I find out about them?”

I said: “I have an old book by James Freeman Clarke called ‘The Ten Great Religions.’ I will lend you that, if you like.”

"I will be grateful," he replied. "I will promise to take the best of care of it."

"It is a big book and will take you a good deal of time. You should have a notebook and make notes of the important points."

"I have already taken care of that, sir. I have given the order that I shall never forget anything I read."

"That will save a lot of time and trouble," I told him. I forebore to smile, and Tom was not aware of my condescending tone. In course of time I took the opportunity to test his mind and found that the order was working. He never did forget.

"What other books?" he demanded.

"Well, there are great tomes by Gerald Massey. He was an English scholar who spent about forty years studying hieroglyphics, and he traced most of the ancient religious ideas and rites to the Egyptians. He wrote a work called *Ancient Egypt, the Light of the World*; also he wrote *The Natural Genesis*, attributing all the ancient religions to a common sun-god myth. The sun god is the source of all light and power, and he comes to earth to redeem mankind from sin and death. Nearly always he is born of a virgin."

"Oh, I want to read about those things!" exclaimed my new pupil. "Mr. Amytage, I want to ask a favour. If I take those books home and read them my family will think I am idling and it will make a lot of trouble, but if you will let me come and sit in a corner of your backyard, nobody will see me, and if I say I am at your place, they will think I am working and earning the money I bring them. I will promise to be very quiet and never get in your way."

“You will be welcome, Tom,” I answered. “I assure you I am interested in this strange adventure.”

“I must have your help, Mr. Amytage. You can’t imagine how scared I am at heart. I really don’t dare to stop and think about this power.”

“You may have a hard time trying not to become self-important,” I warned him. “There was a learned Englishman who wrote a sentence which is frequently quoted ‘Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.’ ”

“I don’t want that to happen to me. I keep telling myself that *They* won’t let me do anything unless it is right. But then the idea occurs to me, suppose *They* don’t want what is right.”

“I wouldn’t dwell on that, Tom,” I said. “If you do, you will have not a religion but a demonology.” I said it with a smile, but I couldn’t keep the mood of smiling for long in the face of what was happening in a corner of my backyard.

CHAPTER THREE

1

STAN called me up from the bank and told me the money was OK. The Subtreasury had sent them a cheque and it had been deposited to my account. "Congratulations," said my tennis partner, and invited me for a game. I could guess that he was curious, and hopeful that I would say something more: but I didn't. He was bound to be wondering if there was more of the money, and he would go on watching my account. I was half expecting to be invited to his home.

I reported to Tom what had happened, and he

exhibited no surprise. "Of course," he said. "The money is perfectly good. Do you want some more?"

I replied, with emphasis: "No, I have plenty." I said no more, but when I went into the house there was another thousand dollar note lying in plain sight on my desk. I took it and went out into the back garden where Tom had found himself a shady spot under my fig tree. "Look here, old man," I said, "you mustn't do this." I tried to give him the money, but he wouldn't take it, and we had an argument. I said, "What are you trying to do, buy me?"

He answered, "What I am trying to do, Mr. Amytage, is to convince you that you don't have to go on teaching school kids. You are much too important for that, and it's foolish to waste your time. It is a perfectly honourable job for you to educate and guide me. I need you and why shouldn't I outbid the school?"

So we sat down and had it out. "I might be glad to help," I admitted. "It depends on what you are going to do."

"Come and watch for a while," he replied. "Give me a chance to show you."

"That sounds plausible, and if it was a question of sitting here and reading books I would say all right. But you are planning a career; you are going out into the world and try to change it, and I gather you are not going to delay too long about it."

"Not a moment longer than I have to."

"All right then, I'll be committing myself to you. The moment you start out working miracles you'll be the centre of the world's attention, and how much chance would I stand of ever having an academic career after that? I'll be known as your man Friday,

your fidus Achates—" I stopped and started to explain, "This was a Greek—"

"You needn't bother," said Tom, "I've given an order that I shall understand what you say. Man Friday was Robinson Crusoe's servant and fidus Achates was the friend of Aeneas."

"I'll try to remember," I said. "Don't think that I fail to appreciate the importance of this new educational technique."

But Tom had no idea of irony. "What I am going to do is to set up a new moral code and teach human beings to be decent to one another. That's my idea of education, and I'm inviting you to come and help run the school."

"I admit that I am tempted, but I see what's coming when you start working your miracles. You are going to be surrounded by mobs—there will be a terrific commotion—"

"Commotion heck! In the next year or two I am due to be drafted into the army. I am physically sound, and they'll take me—and don't you suppose I'll see commotion in Korea? If it comes to another world war, you as an unmarried man will be drafted too—and don't you suppose you'll see some commotion?"

"I don't doubt that, Tom—"

"What I say is, come, help me prevent that war!"

"You've already made a try at it—"

"I know, but I didn't try the right way. I'm being guided, Mr. Amytage. I have told you only a small part of it. I make experiments. I think of a new one every hour or so and try it. I ask if this is right, if that is right, and I'm told. Look—I'll show you!" He raised his voice in a special solemn tone, which he had adopted

for addressing the higher powers. "Tell Mr. Amytage that I am right," he commanded. "Drop a silver dollar on his head."

I am not in the habit of wearing a hat, and I wasn't in time to duck before the object hit me—fortunately flat, not edgeways. I picked it up off the ground and gazed at it dumbfounded.

"Seeing is believing," said my pupil, now teacher. "Does that satisfy you?"

"I point out to you, Tom, that I had glasses on—"

"Don't worry. They'll never hurt you. Everything they do is right. Drop another one and show him." I put up my hands quickly and so the dollar struck them.

"There's your interstitial osmosis," said the miracle man. "Did you ever before see silver dollars growing on fig trees? Both the dollars and the figs are good and you can have as many as you want. Come and see what Didymus is going to do."

2

My new employer made me the promise to let me guide him in his experiments; I might help him devise tests and interpret meanings. We would work together to solve the mystery—and what could be a more important bit of research? I wrote a note to my principal, telling him that I had taken up a line of study which required all my time, and I applied for a leave of absence without pay for the rest of the year. Tom told his family that I needed his services all the time, and he moved over to my house; we lived there in bachelor's

hall, getting our own meals and rarely going out. He read books and asked a thousand questions about them, many more than I could answer.

But he could always get the answers by his simple techniques. He would sit at a table with a book in front of him and give his order. "If this is what you want me to do, move the book." And the book would move a little. If it failed to move it meant that the answer was No.

All this was at the time of the stalemate in Korea, the beginning of the phony negotiations for a truce. Tom asked if he would be allowed to bring those negotiations to an end favourable to the United Nations forces. The book did not move. The book did not move when he proposed to set free the satellites of the Soviet Union but when he asked if he was to stick to his idea of setting up a new ethical code the book moved vigorously. It was something like a spiritualist séance, only it was conducted in broad daylight, and there was no chance for any hocus-pocus; it was in my home and I sat watching with all my senses alert. It might be that Tom was influencing the moving of that book, but if so, he was doing it by psychic means and not by physical.

He asked the book if he should do his work by means of "signs", that is miracles, and the answer was Yes. He asked if he might take the name of Didymus as his missionary cognomen, and again it was Yes. He asked if the old-time Didymus was present, and the book was still. He asked if *They* who were guiding him would stand by him through the entire procedure, and the book was almost pushed off the table. "So there you are," said Tom. And I had to admit that I was.

I was surprised and at the same time a bit amused to

observe the decisiveness which developed in the character of my one-time yardboy. He set about the task of founding a new religion with the same clear-sighted determination that General Eisenhower had planned the invasion of Normandy. Every contingency must be foreseen, and every countermove planned. He would ask my opinion, and would listen to what I had to say; then he would announce his decision. If I still insisted, the issue would be referred to that novel kind of ouija-board, and it would give the final decision. I observed that it was always inclined to the side of dignity and conservatism. This was to be no fly-by-night enterprise, no cheap sensationalism; it was to be a permanent movement, a systematic and persistent effort to save mankind from its self-made follies and evils.

Tom Strawn had a practical mind, and concerned himself very little with the nature of the mysterious *They* who were providing the guidance. But I, having a more speculative mind, could never get away from the problem. I tried to find out, but in vain. No question of that sort was answered. I had Tom ask, "Are you God?" and the book lay still. He asked, "Are you angels?" and it was the same. He asked, "Are you cherubim or seraphim?"—and it was the same. But when he asked, "Am I to be limited in the amount of money I spend for the cause?" the answer was prompt and clear: he was *not*.

3

I had undertaken the study of the New Testament Apocrypha because it was a field which appeared to be neglected by the scholars. I had found the acts of Thomas, called Didymus, quite charming, and had been fascinated by the discovery that on the Malabar coast of India there lived between one and two million Christians in the midst of Hindu and Mohammedan fanaticism, clinging firmly to the faith which the apostle had brought them from a distance of nineteen hundred miles and as many years. They were certain that the one-time doubter had come there and persuaded the inhabitants of seven different cities to accept his new faith.

I had been planning to treat these legends with that gentle and kindly tolerance which was the proper tone for a modern sophisticate; but now my mind was thrown into confusion. I had to face the fact that these miracles might have happened. For Tom, of course, they were obvious; he could do them, too, and the only question was, what would be their effect? Suppose, for example, that he went into a public square in Los Angeles which had a fountain and began to throw water into the air and have it turn into flowers—how would that affect the public? Would it convert them to his faith? I doubted it. Of course he could gather a crowd, but everybody would be sure it was some new sleight-of-hand stunt, and the only question would be how he did it. The newspapers would take it for granted

that it was an advertisement for a show, and the public would come to that show, but only a few feeble-minded ones would connect it with the hunger and thirst after righteousness.

No, it had to be something solemn and impressive. There had to be a creed, and there had to be a code of laws, and there had to be rites to move the emotions and impress the minds of the beholders. Tom became a tireless student of the esoteric worship of the sun god and of all the ancient mystery religions. I discovered that I had got myself in for a course of research and study more extensive than had ever been required for an academic degree. The books in my study and in the library of the college no longer sufficed; I drove my charge into Los Angeles, and we made the rounds of the secondhand bookstores. This hodge-podge of a city abounds in secret cults and metaphysical movements, and you can buy more occult literature than you could read in a lifetime. We loaded up the car and went back home, and for weeks all that Tom did was to sit out in the shade of my figtree, or when it rained by a window of my study, and read, mark, and inwardly digest.

He learned all the legends concerning Osiris and her son Horus, concerning Tammuz and Adonis, Mithras and Sabazius, Apollo and Hercules, Krishna and Witoba. He knew where these religions had been taught, the temples that had been built and the sculptures that were in them; he knew the creeds and rituals, the codes of law, the commandments, sometimes even the vestments the priests had worn. Was he going to get himself up in such vestments and decorate his temple with the signs of the zodiac? He said he wasn't sure yet, but *They* would tell him in good time.

4

One thing I saw he had become set upon, and that was an ascetic discipline. He had been repelled by the way he had seen the young people of our time behaving and by the notions of freedom and self-assertion which had come to prevail. Sex was all tied up in his mind with marijuana and cocaine—"reefers" and "snow" they called these—with cocktails and hip-pocket flasks and petting parties in automobiles. He had been influenced, I learned, by health notions which he had read in nature-cure magazines. He confided to me that he had never had anything to do with a woman, and suggested that he would proclaim himself one of the Hamemmet Beings which he learned about in *The Book of the Dead* of the Egyptians. When I pointed out that these ascetic cults had often led to abnormal sexuality, he said he would deal with that in due course. He did not believe there could be any religion without virtue, and by that he meant sexual abstinence.

He wanted it for men, and he wanted it for women. He read all about the Vestal Virgins of the Romans and the sacred maidens of the other cults. Some of these had given birth to gods, and one day Tom took my breath away by the announcement, "We must arrange to have a virgin birth."

"Oh, my God!" I exclaimed. He wanted to know why not, and I told him it was a horrid idea and would be taken for that by almost everybody. "In the first place you can't get anybody to believe it, and if they do they

will relate it to present day faiths and think you are being blasphemous."

"But that is foolish," said my new teacher. "We can show them that it was all in ancient Egypt, nearly seven thousand years ago. The god Horus was born of the virgin mother Isis, and the birth was foretold by an angel, and there were three sages who came to kneel before the infant deity. It is all on carvings on the walls of the temple of Luxor, dating from at least seventeen centuries before the Christian era."

"All that may be true," I said, "but it won't make any difference. They will call it nonsense and hate you for it. Myself, I think that nowadays it would seem obscene."

"Yes, Mr. Amytage. But you are a college man and have your notions of good taste. I belong to the people, and the people aren't like that; they are primitive in both their feelings and their talk. They know the facts of generation and are not afraid to speak of them. Nothing could impress them so much as a virgin birth; it means divine descent, and it's found in nearly all the cults."

"Maybe so," I declared. "But you'll find it impossible to get away with in our time."

"I have inquired and *They* tell me it can be arranged." Then, seeing the look on my face, he added: "I'll ask again." He gave the order: "Tell me if you can arrange for a scientifically-proven virgin birth."

I might have known that the book would move, for it was the massive work of Gerald Massey, and it's all in that. The book moved, and my heart sank. I saw what a mess I had got myself into. But it was too late; I couldn't get out. I had given up my job and made

myself financially dependent upon the occult powers; and besides, I have to admit that I was lured on by curiosity. Who wouldn't have been?

5

I followed along, but I couldn't cease to warn my leader about the dangers. "If you make such an announcement, you will be staking your whole movement upon it; and suppose it fails? Suppose the powers can't do this incredible thing?"

"Isn't it incredible when *They* move the book?" he demanded. "When neither you nor I are near it, and when you have examined the table to be sure there are no wires or other devices? If a thing is incredible it's incredible, and it can't be more so."

"With the book you run no risk; you can try and make sure in advance. But with this new scheme there is no way to try."

"Oh, but there is," he replied, "and I have ordered the test. I wasn't going to tell you because I know how squeamish you are; but if you will promise me on your word of honour—"

"I have put myself in your hands," I said, "and I have to stay with you—of course, unless it's a crime."

"You may decide that this is a crime," he admitted, with one of his charming smiles lighting up his ruddy face. "I have already given the order that a certain young lady in this town shall immaculately conceive."

If he had ordered a bolt of lightning to hit the house,

I could not have been more shocked. "Oh, Tom," I exclaimed, "How perfectly ghastly!"

"A little tough on her, I admit," he said, "but it's in the interest of all the rest of humanity. People have frequently volunteered to make tests in the cause of science; they let themselves be bitten by infected mosquitoes or otherwise inoculated with disease germs. There was no way I could call for volunteers in this case, so I just had to pick somebody at random."

"But it won't prove anything, Tom."

"It will prove it to me, and that's all that's necessary at present."

"But you can't really be sure," I persisted. "It might be a natural event."

"I chose a young lady who is practically above suspicion; a preacher's daughter, and a most sedate and proper person. I put my faith in her character."

I was pretty nearly speechless, but managed to exclaim, "You will ruin the woman's life!"

"Not at all. I will see that she is provided with plenty of money—that will happen magically, and she will think it's a sign from heaven."

"She will go and spend it to have an abortion, and you won't know about it."

"She is far too moral a person for that. And, anyhow, if she did, it wouldn't make any difference so far as the test is concerned. Can an immaculate conception occur? That is the question, and all the religious people should be grateful to me for proving it."

"I don't think they will be in the least grateful," I said—and I could not keep the indignation out of my tone.

"Really it is not so bad, Mr. Amytage," pleaded the

other. "When you think it over you will realize that something had to be done. The future of humanity depends upon it, and I assure you that this young lady will be taken care of. She will get messages and will be told what to do. She will go off somewhere and have her baby in due course, and will introduce herself as a widow and very soon find a husband to take care of her and the child. Surely you must realize that *They* can arrange all that. I don't want to tell you who she is, but probably you'll find out. It's impossible to keep secrets in this gossipy small town."

I came down on my friend suddenly, and hard. "Look here, Tom. Tell me the truth. Have you got some girl into trouble?"

He broke into a laugh. "And me getting ready to revive the Hamemmet Beings!"

"I want you to tell me," I insisted.

"I give you my word of honour, Mr. Amytage, I have never met the lady and never spoken a word to her in my life."

"How did you choose her?"

"I chose her by her position and reputation. I had to choose someone who was above suspicion by worldly persons like yourself."

There was nothing more I could say; but from then on I felt uncomfortable about this whole adventure. There are only a limited number of "preachers" in our town, and I knew several and their families. I couldn't keep my thoughts from wandering from one to another of young and middle-aged ladies, speculating about the fate which might have befallen one of them. There ran through my head two lines of a poem I had learned as a little fellow: "Which would it be? Which would it be?"

I looked at John, John looked at me." I wouldn't dare to look at any of those ladies!

I couldn't place too much blame upon an illiterate youth who had been confronted with tremendous decisions and was groping his way. But what was I to think of those mysterious powers which had taken control of his destiny and mine and were seeking to take control of the human race? They had sanctioned a wholly fantastic course; and who were they and what were they? Were they perpetrating some colossal joke? Were they deciding some Olympian wager? Surely we had no reason for feeling certain that their wishes were the same as ours, their interests the same as ours. Brooding over this, my mind recalled four ominous words which had been written by Charles Fort, a man who spent a lifetime collecting strange and forbidding facts about our world: "We are fished for."

CHAPTER FOUR

WHO were these fishers of men? Tom didn't know, and would never pretend to know. He said he would not use the word God because it had acquired too many sectarian connotations. He said he would like to use the word "Masters," but the Theosophists had appropriated it. He decided upon the word Teachers. *They* were teaching him, and he was going to teach mankind. Americans were great believers in education, and it would be a dignified title. I, as a teacher, had to agree. He would refuse to enter into

discussions about it or to answer questions. He would say that *They* had chosen to stay behind the veil. What *They* taught was truth, and he was the deputy teacher and would appoint sub-deputies all over the earth.

We spent much time working out our code of ethics. It was to be a rigidly disciplined order. Members would pledge themselves against alcohol, tobacco, and sexual promiscuity. No one would be permitted to grow fat, and they would not lead luxurious lives; two suits of clothing would suffice, one for winter and one for summer, and that would apply to women as well as men. It was a poor boy speaking, and he had observed the rich and despised them in his heart, and was going to punish them by excluding them from his heaven. "Go to now, ye rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you. Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten. Your gold and silver is cankered; and the rust of them shall be a witness against you, and shall eat your flesh as it were fire."

All the great teachers of the past were to be honoured, and their birthdays were to be celebrated. There would be rituals and initiations. There would be badges and awards and degrees of honour for service to the cause. There would be meetings and prayers and hymns. It was going to be a singing and dancing movement, and the music must be full of what Tom called ginger and pep. It was to be a dynamic movement, and anyone who took up with it would have plenty to do. The youthful ex-gardener sat and worked it out to the minutest detail. He referred everything to me, and I gave my criticisms and suggestions, and then the final decision was put up to the Teachers. If the book moved,

it became the Law; there would be a whole new set of laws to be binding upon the human race for all time.

As it happened, there had been some kind of celebration in our town and a dance band had been hired from Hollywood. The leader was a black boy with two rows of gleaming white teeth and white eyeballs which he rolled. He lived what he played, and he was more fun than the music. Tom said that was the man for him, and we went over to Hollywood and found him. There were seven musicians and their price was two hundred dollars a night. He hired them on the spot for seven nights a week, beginning immediately. He instructed them to go to the music stores and buy all the records that had life in them—jazz records, classical records, New Orleans blues and hill-billy tunes, Methodist Gospel hymns, Salvation Army songs, old-time wobbly songs, everything they could find. We would help ourselves to all the lively tunes, and nobody would get paid, including Tchaikovsky.

Tom and I collected hymn books, especially those used by the non-sectarian groups, the Unitarians, the Humanists, the Reformed Jews, the Ethical Culturists. Tom chose what suited him and worked over the material, cutting out every phrase that had a theological tinge. So presently we had a song book for the Wakeners, as he was calling us. And presently it was on the press in a large edition, strongly-bound and ready to be distributed over the world.

2

The leader of this new movement of faith and delight took the professional name of Didymus—that being the Latin form and looking more natural to Americans. I pointed out that it wouldn't be much of a disguise, because all Bible readers would know that Didymus was what Thomas had been called. Anybody who was in doubt had only to look up the name in a Concordance. Tom said that was all right, he didn't care if they found him out and where he had come from; he had to come from somewhere. Didymus was his patron saint and inspirer; he asked the book, and the book moved.

I saw the storm warnings and knew what a tornado of publicity was coming. I wanted to spare my relatives and friends as much as I could, so I too adopted a professional name. I would call myself John Smith, which was obvious enough. Sooner or later the newspaper reporters would track me down, but at least my friends would know that I had tried to spare them. Tom acceded to my desire to stay in the background. What he wanted was my advice, and he agreed that I should be simply a friend and would refuse to talk about him at any time to anybody.

Someone had to open an office and run it and attend to the hundreds of details that were coming up. We didn't want anyone from our home town and we didn't know anyone else. I inserted a small advertisement in a newspaper, calling for a young man with business experience, educated, sober, and with references. That

brought many replies, and we studied them and picked out several and interviewed them. The process was simple. Tom asked questions and I watched the book. When the book moved I gave him a signal and we hired that one. He was just out of college and had run a college paper. He did not drink or smoke, and said he was ready for an adventure. He surely got it.

There was a so-called "Temple" in the heart of Los Angeles where a woman evangelist had operated for many years. Now she was dead and the institution was lagging. Tom attended the service and looked the place over. It seated about three thousand persons, and that wasn't enough, but would do for a start. Later on it would be used for meetings of the chosen; the open meetings could be held in the Hollywood Bowl. The new business manager was instructed to buy the Temple, paying what was asked; money was no object. A staff was engaged to clean the place and take care of it, and a score of high-school students were engaged for a Saturday evening meeting to distribute the song books and guide the populace to their seats on the floor and in the galleries. All was ready for a big Saturday night meeting—everything but the publicity and the crowd.

How were these to be got? Obviously by means of a miracle, or a set of them. That was the way the ancient Didymus had done it, and the modern Didymus was going to walk in his footsteps. We discussed this subject for weeks, we discussed all the miracles which Didymus did and those of the other saints and martyrs, and the members of mystery religions and esoteric cults. It had to be something public and conspicuous, it had to be something which could not possibly harm anybody, and it had to be something of which the Teachers approved.

Manifestly any such miracle would be opposed, not merely by the scientific and materialist-minded world but also by all religious groups and organizations. Many of these believed in miracles of the past, but seldom in any of the present, and with one accord they would resent and resist an unauthorized and unorthodox miracle. That would be poaching, that would be piracy—worse yet, it would be blasphemy.

3

My ex-gardener's fancy had been caught by the subject of levitation. The ancient records we had studied were full of this peculiar manifestation. In the Old Testament Habakkuk had been "translated" from Judea to Babylon and Elias had been "levitated in a whirlwind." In the New Testament Philip had been "translated" from Gaza to Azortes. Among the Yogi, levitations "had been a regular practice." It was in the "Puranas," in the Sanscrit language, and in the Buddhist "Suttas." In the life of Apollonius by Philostratus it was told how in the third century a disciple named Damis, one of the Indian gymnosophists, had floated in the air at the height of an arm's length. He did this not to astound the witnesses but in order to please the gods, a tribute to the sun.

And in all the early centuries of Christianity levitation had been a common affair. An Egyptian-born monk of the fifth century had raided a pagan temple and was brought to trial in Antioch. In the presence of the judges and the crowd he had ascended into the air

and pleaded his cause from high above. Frequent and continuous acts of levitation had been recorded in the *Acta Sanctorum*. St. Dunstan had been levitated on the day of the Ascension in the year 988, St. Stephen, King of Hungary, camping with his army had been levitated while praying in his tent. More than two hundred Catholic saints of both sexes had been levitated since the eleventh century. Saint Theresa de Avila in the sixteenth century had been levitated so frequently and had attracted so much attention that she had prayed the Lord to spare her this ordeal. Saint Joseph de Copertino had his levitations witnessed by a pope, and by many cardinals, and bishops, noblemen and doctors. In the *Acta Sanctorum*, volume five, it is recorded that he ascended into an olive tree and floated over a branch like a bird. Then his ecstasy came to an end and he had no way to get down until they brought a ladder to help him. He was observed to have fifteen levitations in the presence of images of the Virgin.

Of course all modern scientific men reject this as nonsense; and they pay no more attention to the modern instances. The distinguished Italian Professor Lombroso described the levitations of Eusapia Palladino. Other scientists and physicians described the levitations of William Stainton Moses and of the two Schneider brothers. The most striking case of all was that of D. D. Home, who was studied in the greatest detail by Sir William Crookes, at that time the leading physicist and chemist of Great Britain. Home operated in broad daylight and in the presence of many witnesses. He would seat himself in a chair, the chair would rise off the ground, and witnesses would pass their hands under all four of the chair legs. He did this a hundred times in the

home of Crookes. At No. 5 Buckingham Gate he floated out of a window and re-entered the room by the same window.

4

So now the new prophet announced, "Levitation is what I am going to do." And he asked me, "Where can I buy some kind of foreign-looking clothes?" I drove him to one of those costume establishments in Hollywood where you can find anything worn by people between the North Pole and Zanzibar, and in time between the cave man and the Brown Derby. He chose the robe of an Arabian sheik, such as might have been worn by Emir Faisal in real life; it was of fine white cloth and had an elaborately embroidered tarboosh. "That will slay them," said the prophet, paid the high price, and ordered alterations. He wanted the robe to be longer in the back, to make a sort of train, and he wanted a button on each side and buttonholes so that when he wished to walk he could pick up the train and fasten it out of the way. We came back in an hour or so and got the garment, and he said: "There is no use wasting time; let's go now and do the job."

"Where?" I asked. He smiled and replied: "I will let you guess."

I had pictured him standing in some public park, perhaps Pershing Square, and I had not been pleased over it. But no, he was a man of taste and dignity now. It happened that there was a public scandal in the city; the members of the Board of Education had been taking commissions on goods sold to the schools. The matter

was being discussed before the City Council, and the newspapers were full of it. Important people would be there, and, most important of all, the photographers; so that was our destination.

We had to park some distance away, and before alighting Didymus put on his sheik's costume. I expected that we would attract attention walking to the City Hall, but I forgot that Los Angeles is not merely Hollywood, it is also a great port to which visitors come from all parts of the earth. A few persons turned their heads to look at a carrot-haired Arabian sheik, but only a few. We found the council chamber at the City Hall packed and a crowd in the corridor. All the seats were taken, and there was a large, sturdy attendant on guard at the door; but that wasn't going to stop a man from saving the world. To the crowd he said, "Kindly make way for the Emir of Fashodaland." I had never heard of that land before and neither had anybody else, but the crowd moved, though not always with good grace. The Emir strode to the guardian of the door. "The Emir of Fashodaland," he announced, and at the same moment took the hand of the guardian and deftly slipped a bank-note into it. The guardian looked down, and saw the figure ten, and the door came open. "This is my secretary," said the Emir, and we went in and the door was closed behind us.

Inside was a member of the Fire Department, who came to us as if to say that standing was not permitted. But Didymus had no idea of standing, or of wasting time on discussion. He raised his two hands over his head as if he were about to take a dive. He said: "I order levitation," and straightway he began to go up into the air. The fireman stared just as if he were wit-

nessing a miracle. He had orders regarding standing in the aisles, but apparently nothing regarding floating in the air. Up went the Emir, and the councilman up in front who was asking a question stopped in the middle of it, and all the others turned to follow his gaze.

Didymus went up about ten feet and then started to glide over the audience. He went rather fast, with his white train floating—an extraordinary spectacle. All eyes were turned upon him, and there was a murmur of amazement, of horror, perhaps even of terror, who could say? All eyes followed the figure, including the chairman and the other members of the city council. Here and there people rose from their seats, ready to leap to one side if he should fall.

5

Still gliding and turning slowly and majestically, Didymus began to speak. He had a solemn pontifical manner, and could be sure of an attentive audience. He said:

“There is corruption and crime throughout the land; there is drunkenness, wantonness and vice. America the beautiful must be cleansed and saved. I am sent to proclaim a new order to the world, a new birth of the spirit. Let there be an awakening, let there be light in the souls of men. I order it and will guide it. Let all who wish to hear my words come to the Temple of the New Life at seven o’clock on Saturday evening. Let all attend who love the land of our forefathers, and together we shall set out to cleanse it of vice and crime. The

Teachers will be there and I will be their mouthpiece. There has been nothing like it in modern times. It is a new birth, a new deliverance, a new salvation. Come one, come all Wakeners to the Temple of the New Life on Saturday evening at seven o'clock. I have spoken. Hear my words and mark them well."

All through this speech he was floating slowly about the council chamber with a train like the tail of the bird of paradise spread out behind him. Every eye in the place followed, and every ear in the place heard him; when he had finished he came gently down from where he had started, alongside me. He buttoned up his train, tapped on the door, and when the guardian opened it he walked out, and I followed.

As I had foreseen, that was the end of all privacy. Many in the hall leaped up and followed us. There was a babble in the corridor, and a train of people formed behind us, some rushing up, asking questions. But Didymus spoke not a word. We hailed a taxi and got in, and I told the driver there would be a five-dollar bill for him if he managed to shake off pursuers. He did so, weaving here and there and driving around several blocks. Meantime Didymus slipped out of his costume and rolled it into a bundle. When at last we got out we waited until the driver had gone on before we walked to our own car. So we got away without having one licence number taken.

"Well, how did it come off?" asked the prophet, and I said, "It was perfect."

We drove home, and of course nobody there had any idea of our connection with the event. I have a sister older than myself, one of the young matrons of the town. I called her up to tell her that I was going into Los

Angeles to stay for a few days, having work to do in the library. She asked if I had heard the news of what had happened in the city. I didn't fib to her; I just said, "What?" She had been listening to the voices of city council men and school board members telling how it felt to have a large-sized man hovering about ten feet over their heads.

We did our own listening and learned that the deeds of Didymus had become the top story of the evening. It had gone all over the country and reactions were coming back. The outside world took it as a typical Hollywood hoax and welcomed it with gusto; but the people of Los Angeles heard the superintendent of their City Hall declare there were no wires in the council chamber and that a thorough search by experts had failed to reveal any means by which the phenomenon could have been produced. Photographers had been present at the meeting and pictures had been shot of the strangely-clad figure up in the air. Next morning, of course, those pictures were on the front page of all the newspapers of the city, and, as we learned later, of the important newspapers of the country.

CHAPTER FIVE

I

WE had learned our lesson, and when we went into the big city next day Didymus carried his robe in a suitcase and I parked my car in a garage. We took a taxicab and were driven to a hotel not too far from the Temple. We registered under names having nothing to do with our own, and our new business manager came and told us that the Temple was under siege by newspaper reporters and photographers. Naturally this young fellow was in a state of excitement, having discovered for the first time the nature of the job

for which he had been hired. He said he was "game"; and he had need to be.

The Negro band leader was summoned and we went over the programme for the evening. There was to be a lot of music and singing by the audience, and of course the miracle would be repeated. We would come early and enter by the stage door of the Temple, and since the prophet would not be in costume he would presumably not be recognized. Didymus was going to make the speech of his life, but wasn't in the least nervous about it, I found; he had asked the Teachers to be with him and had their promise.

He occupied himself with engaging a secretary and an assistant, both with the help of the book. When we arrived in the middle of the afternoon at the Temple we found the streets already crowded. We were driven to the stage door where there were two policemen on duty. We were not recognized and had no trouble. In a private suite which the old-time evangelist had provided for herself the new one sat quietly reading Salferte's *The Philosophy of Magic*. He was astonishingly serene and left it for me and his other employees to do the fretting about details.

I would go on to the stage and peer out through a peep-hole in the curtain, watching an elaborate apparatus being set up for a television presentation of the events. The photographers had come early, to make sure of getting favourable positions, and newspaper reporters were prowling about the place, seeking every scrap of information about the mysterious performer and his tricks. I played the part of Peter, who thrice denied his Lord; I said I knew nothing whatever about it, I was just an employee of the Temple. I was asked if

there were wires or other trick devices, and I bade the reporters look and satisfy themselves. One of them had brought a pair of opera glasses and was searching the ceiling.

2

The doors were opened a half hour ahead, and the crowds surged in. In the first ten or fifteen minutes every seat was taken, and then the fire department closed the doors. I was told there were ten times as many persons outside as inside. Most of them stayed, for there were loudspeakers in the square across the street and they could hear what was going on. The Temple organ provided music, taking turns with the Negro band in the orchestra pit.

Promptly on the minute of seven there was silence and the curtain went up. One single figure came slowly upon the scene—Didymus in his costume. That it was the costume of a tribal chieftain and not of a religious leader did not trouble either him or his audience; to all of them it was exotic, and that was enough. He had ordered a dozen of them since a modern prophet had to be cleaner than the ancients.

He came to the front centre and stood in silence with bowed head. Then slowly he raised his arms, putting his hands together in a point as if he were ready to cleave the air; then amid a hush in which you could have heard a mouse move, his feet came slowly off the floor. Up he went, inch by inch—up until he was at least ten feet from the stage floor. He spread his arms as if they had been airplane wings, and started to glide

forward. First there came a murmur from the crowd, then it grew to a roar. They hadn't thought he could do it—at least thousands of them hadn't thought it. I read in the newspapers afterwards that hundreds of thousands of dollars had changed hands in those few seconds. Betting commissioners had been active at the Stock Exchange and the hotels and other places where people with money gathered.

He made a complete job of it this time. He made a circle of the auditorium, and when he came back to the stage he went up another ten feet and made a circle in front of the crowds in the gallery. He made mystical wavings of his arms, he dipped as if bowing to them, and increased his speed as if he were on a roller-coaster. It was as if he said to them "Could wires do this?" And when he was over the stage he let himself down to a perfect two-point landing on his feet.

There he stood motionless and began his indictment of present-day manners and morals. He told about corruption and crime; he had come to cleanse this sweet land of liberty, and when he was through he was going to other lands and tell them about it. Men must cease to be animals, they must realize that they had minds and souls and must guard and develop them. He was setting out to found a new order of devoted and faithful persons, men, women and children.

He was not going to use any of the old terms; he was not calling it a religion, he was not calling himself a saint or a prophet or anything of that sort. He was not entering into rivalry with anybody else, he was not denouncing or ridiculing or even replacing any other faith. He was calling for a new morality, and he proceeded to read his list of strict requirements. Let nobody

join the Wakeners who was not willing to pledge his honour and keep it. Those who reneged would surely be punished—he could not say how, he did not know. There were powers behind him; they had revealed themselves to him by signs and wonders. He had asked, but *They* would not tell him who or what *They* were; certainly *They* were beyond anything human. *They* knew everything and could confer gifts, and had done so. He said, “the Teachers,” and let that suffice.

It was going to be a happy movement, nothing glum or grim about it. They would find that all the negatives in their code had been turned into positives. They would be so happy in their new life that they would not want strong drink; they would be so filled with the love of brothers and sisters that they would not have any interest in lewdness. They would dance and they would sing—they would begin at once with Hymn Number One, which they would find in the books on their seats.

And straightway the young Negro with the shining white teeth and eyeballs started up his band, and when he had played the tune through, Didymus called, “*Sing*,” and everybody sang. They had been doing it in this Temple for many years; they had been doing it in thousands of little churches in Iowa and Oklahoma from which the congregations had come. Didymus buttoned up his white train, and now we moved back and forth across the stage, keeping time to the music with hands and arms and feet; all very graceful, not grotesque as I would have expected it. Of course he had asked the Teachers how to do it, and *They* had taught him.

The congregation sang and clapped their hands and stamped their feet, and it was the old glory come back to

the world. The prophet became excited and pranced about; then he would sign for silence and stand in front of the microphone and lay down the law and pledge them to it. He was going to set up a school and teach the code to qualified persons and send them out over the country. They would go as apostles had gone through all the ages. They would carry the faith. Money would be provided, money would be poured out. There was plenty of money in America, and it would be used to save America. There was work at home, and here in the City of the Angels, and all over the rest of the land for all who were willing to work. He lifted them up with his eloquence, and then he scared them with his warnings, and then they would sing and shout some more.

3

There came a strange event, another miracle, unplanned and unforeseen. A woman sitting in one of the front rows came into the aisle with a little child leading her. There were steps from the aisle to the platform, and she came up, guided by the child. "I am blind," she shouted. "Help me, Master!" She rushed to Didymus and fell on her knees before him and caught his robe in her hands and kissed it. "Help me, help me, I am blind," she pleaded. He gave her his hand and lifted her up; what else could he do? "Touch my eyes," she pleaded; "heal me." He touched her eyes, and instantly she gave a scream, "I can see you, Master! Oh, God be praised!"

Of course the cynical would say that it had been

planned, but I knew that it hadn't. I had discussed with Didymus the idea of becoming a healer. It was one of the most obvious ways of making converts; the old Didymus had done it, and it was in all the traditions and the ancient books. But he had answered firmly No, that was one thing he would not do. He was interested in morals; let the doctors deal with health. If he became a healer he would be surrounded by swarms of people, his footsteps would be dogged, and he would be unable to think about anything else. "Healing is out," he said, and I am sure he meant it.

But here he was—caught. How could he help it when the woman rushed upon the stage? Was he to run away from her, or to order her away, in front of all that enthusiastic crowd? Was he to say, "I can float in the air, but I have no power over disease?" Was he to admit that there was any limitation to his power? And if the Teachers, the mysterious ones, saw fit to do healing, who was he to say *Them* nay? He knew nothing about disease, but then neither had he known anything about levitation, except what he had read in the books. And now here he was—a healer!

It touched off a riot in the place. From all over the audience men and women, old and young, rose up and fought their way to the platform; the lame, the halt, the blind. They had read about it in the Bible, and had come hoping for just this event. They would touch the hem of his garment, and he would feel that some of his "virtue" had gone out of him; or he would speak some magic word; he would say, "Thy faith hath made thee whole."

So they came, staggering, groping their way to the platform, many of them assisted by relatives or friends.

They swarmed about the "holy one" shouting, pleading, weeping. There was no more singing and dancing; the Temple was turned into another Grotto of Lourdes. And, on the edges of the milling throng were the photographers flashing their magnesium bulbs, taking pictures of the frenzied petitioners and those who were shouting "Glory, hallelujah!" because they had been made well. Above it all were the streaming bright lights of the TV people—they had set one of their camcras upon a high stand at one side of the stage from which they could look down upon this bedlam.

4

How long this went on I cannot recall. The crowd began to thin out; a dozen healings were a sensation, but a hundred were a bore. I don't know how Didymus would ever have got out; but at last I appealed to the police, and they formed a flying wedge and got to him, surrounded him and carried him away. They took us to my car, and then it was a problem of getting free from our pursuers. A couple of motorcycle officers quickly solved that problem. We turned into a side street and they blocked it, forbidding traffic until we had turned another corner and another. So we came to our hotel. But this did no good because word had spread where we were staying, and there was another crowd and another problem of getting upstairs to our rooms.

I expected to find the healer exhausted by this long ordeal. But no; he said, "I have given orders. I am never to be exhausted, and neither are you."

"But this is going to be a problem, Tom," I persisted—and then corrected myself, "Didymus." That was to be his name, and I must get the habit. "You'll be kept so busy healing that you won't be able to do anything else."

"I know," he answered, "and I tried to avoid it. I am afraid I shall have to cancel the healing power."

"They won't believe you," I declared, "not after tonight. They will crowd around just to touch your robe."

"*They* will tell me what to do," he said, "and I don't have to worry about it. You must admit *They* did a good job tonight. Let's get some sandwiches up."

And that was the way he was going to take it. Nothing was ever allowed to worry him. We ordered the telephone shut off and hung out the "Do not disturb" card, and went to sleep.

In the morning there were the newspapers with a front page story of the world sensation and two inside pages of photographs of both the levitation and the healings. For me the most important circumstance was that I had been snapped along with Didymus; it meant that I had got myself committed for life. All my friends, all my pupils, my colleagues would exclaim, "Why, that's Harry Amytage!" All the prophet's friends, his playmates and former schoolmates would exclaim, "Why, that's Tom Strawn!" They would tell the newspaper correspondents in Elysium, and it would come back to Los Angeles by telephone—it was probably there already.

Sure enough, in the early afternoon editions, there it was. They had my family and my small career. They had interviewed my principal and some of my pupils. They had interviewed my professor and discovered that

I was writing on "The Sources of the New Testament Apocrypha." So they had found out about the miracles of the ancient Thomas called Didymus, and made note of the fact that they were being reproduced by the new Thomas called Didymus. They couldn't say it was a fraud—because there were the pictures of the new Didymus floating around halfway up to the ceiling of the Temple of the New Life!

Of course the reporters began besieging the hotel. They wanted my story as well as Tom's; but I had made up my mind how I was going to handle it. Not one word! Tom was the master and he would do the talking. I was just his friend and former employer, and I knew nothing more about it than the reporters knew. I stuck to that, rude as it seemed, and in the end they learned to let me alone.

As for Tom, he announced that he would have a press conference in the afternoon. With the help of the police he was got over to the Temple, and there he began interviewing candidates for his staff and for the propaganda organization he was going to build. It was a simple matter. He sat in the room by himself, and one by one the candidates were ushered in; he made note of their names and addresses and asked them half a dozen questions, and then watched to see if the massive volume of Massey moved or stayed still. If it moved the person was hired on the spot; if it stayed still the person was told that he would be enrolled as a Temple member and might be employed later on when he had learned about the work and proved his diligence and sincerity. On that basis the prophet could deal with a hundred persons a day and never make a mistake—or so he hoped and believed.

5

Then in the afternoon came the reporters. There were two or three hundred, and the conference had to be shifted to the main auditorium of the Temple. A part of the city of Los Angeles is Hollywood, headquarters of the fanciest publicity experts; there were men and women from most of the countries of the world, and there were studio people, also having their designs upon the wonder worker. He could have had a contract at any price he chose to name, and all he would have had to do was to agree to fly without wings while motion picture cameras were focused upon him.

For two hours he was plied with questions; how did he do it, how did he feel when he did it, and how had he found out about it? Was he in a trance, and did it require any effort, and what use was he planning to make of such a strange power? He told them frankly about the angel, and about the orders he had received and those he was giving. He was going to bring peace to the world. How was he going to do it? Was he going to Russia? What would the Communists do to him if he went? He told them he believed he could get out of any jail by interstitial osmosis—and he had to spell out those words for them. They asked him what he thought would happen if somebody put a bullet in the back of his neck, and he said he didn't know about that; the Teachers would decide whether a martyr was desired. He wasn't having anything to do with politics, and

wasn't going to make use of governments; he was going to appeal to the hearts of men.

He was asked how he expected to reach the hearts of men behind the "Iron Curtain", and he said he didn't think it would be possible to keep anybody in the world from learning about the Wakeners; he might go to the edge of the Iron Curtain and levitate there, and somehow the people inside would learn that it was happening. He might even fly over the Iron Curtain, or through it; he would be told all that in good time. The powers of the soul were greater than materialistic science realized, and he was going to make use of those powers. Men might ignore them, but they did so at heavy cost, and no nation could survive for long without them. That was his message, and the meaning of everything he did.

They asked him if he would levitate for them, and he said he would oblige—of course assuming that *They* had no objection. "How do you know if *They* have an objection?" asked a reporter. And he answered, "I give an order, and if it is obeyed it is because *They* wish it. If it doesn't happen it is because *They* don't wish it." He raised his hands and closed his eyes and slowly went up into the air, holding on to his chair and keeping it under him. Involuntarily everybody in that crowd stood up. He went up high enough so that all could see. They passed their hands and arms under the legs of the chair, and there was nothing but air. It was broad daylight and they could be sure there were no wires.

As if to satisfy them, the mysterious powers caused the chair to move this way and that over the heads of the crowd—and not swinging as would have happened had there been wires. It was convincing when he came down almost on to the heads of the reporters, and they

had to scramble out of the way. There was a burst of spontaneous hand clapping—which helped to make a good story as they wrote it. The most cynical had to agree that the new prophet was modest and straightforward. I caught snatches of the conversation. “By God, he’s got something!”

CHAPTER SIX

I

BACK in the hotel was a telephone call from my sister. Challis is older than I, socially ambitious, very chic, and well-pleased with herself. I assumed that she wanted to give me a scolding for having involved her in this vulgar publicity; but no, it was something else. She wouldn't talk about it over the phone, so I told her to come on in to town.

It proved to be more important than even Challis with all her sophistication could guess. She had read about the healings last night, and wanted to ask a

special favour for a young woman of our home town whom she knew quite well and who was in dreadful trouble. I knew the person only slightly, and will give no clue to her identity. She was somewhere between twenty or thirty, the daughter of one of our local preachers—and I won't hint at the church. The father was a person of the highest reputation, and at first I failed to realize what Challis was talking about—"serious trouble." But my sister said: "Don't be a goose! The doctor tells her she is going to have a baby." I must have looked my consternation, for Challis said, "I know, it's beyond belief; but the doctor assures her it is so. The poor woman is frantic. She says she has never had anything to do with a man, has never thought of such a thing."

"How do you know about her condition?" I asked, and she said, "There's no use telling. Such things go. It's all over town in whispers; one person tells another in confidence, and they're busy telling it in confidence all day."

"Have you talked to her about it?"

"She doesn't even know that I know. But you can take it from me it's true."

Of course I knew what it meant; it was more of what Didymus did—the immaculate conception! I asked what my sister wanted, and she replied: "I thought you healer might do something to help her."

I had to pretend to be dumb, so I said, "You mean an abortion?"

"There's no use using nasty words. If your man has all these wonderful powers, surely he could give a simple order like that. The thing is not very far advanced, and it would be an accident; or the doctors

might discover that they had made a mistake, that it was one of those false pregnancies that you hear about."

I didn't know what Didymus would say to that. The idea hadn't occurred to me, and I doubted if it had occurred to him. I told my sister I would speak to him and do what I could to persuade him. "Will he have to see the woman?" she asked, and I said, "I don't think so." She went away pleased; and I went to Didymus and told him, "Well, you can have your virgin birth."

Of course he was delighted; and when I reported the dreadful plight of the woman his kind heart was touched. "I know all I need to know," he said, "and the experiment is a success. If *They* will consent to have it a false pregnancy, it's all right with me." So he stood up and gave a solemn command and I called up my sister and told her it had been arranged. And that was the end of the matter. The preacher's maiden daughter went on about her good works, and a whisper went out among her friends that it had proved to be a false alarm and there was no need to whisper scandal about her. I thought how lovely it would be if all the problems of women could be solved that simply; but the next time I saw my sister, she remarked: "We'll never know how it really happened!"

2

The uproar over Didymus continued unabated; in fact you could see it growing day by day, and especially night by night. He held the meetings in the Temple seven nights a week, and there was never a time when

there were not many more people outside than could be admitted. The Wakeners sang, shouted, stamped their feet and clapped their hands, and then they crowded up to be healed. At first he treated them individually, then he began to treat them in bunches, and before long he was treating them by sprinkling water all over the throng, and wherever a drop hit it was enough. They went out singing the praises of they knew not what. Perhaps they weren't really healed, but they thought they were and that appeared to suffice. He announced that before long he was going to proclaim a universal healing for the city. Everybody in it would be healed all at once and they would go about shouting and rejoicing.

Of course this was wonderful for the city's business, and the newspapers and merchants were in favour of it. There were scoffers, but they didn't count. All over the country people read the story, and got out the family bus and set out for the City of Our Lady of the Angels. Others came by train, and many whose condition was critical were brought by plane. Stretchers and wheelchairs crowded the aisles of the Temple until the fire department stopped it. After that there were parking places for wheelchairs and the people had to be carried in by hand. There developed a regular business of doing this—"so much per head, with the body and limbs thrown in free," said the man who got the concession.

The prophet in his white sheik's robe was, of course, a conspicuous object; he couldn't go anywhere without being followed by a mob, and he couldn't stop for a moment without being surrounded. There were not merely the sick, there were the common curiosity seekers, and worst of all the autograph hounds. They became a shrieking chorus: "Please, Mr. Didymus, just

one more, Mr. Didymus!" They would try to cut off pieces of his robe or the buttons which held up his flowing train.

It was a dangerous situation and the police department had to take cognizance of it. The attention of the world was centred upon this prophet and it would have been bad advertising indeed if evil had befallen him. Half a dozen specially chosen officers went with him everywhere. They kept out of sight when he was on the platform of the Temple, but the moment he signalled his wish to leave they would surround him like the flying wedge in an old-fashioned football game. They would take him straight through the crowds and out to his car, and when the car started two motorcycle officers would follow. By arrangement our car would turn suddenly into a side street, and the two motorcycle patrolmen would stop and hold the traffic while the car sped on, turned corners and got away. A police car would proceed to our hotel and reform the flying wedge there.

3

Then, piling Pelion on Ossa, heaping a cyclone on top of a hurricane, came the announcement of the proposed virgin birth. Levitations are thrilling, mass healings are dramatic and stirring, but when all is said, nothing can ever take the place of sex. Didymus called another press conference and announced the programme. You could see the reporters, male and female, start and stare; you could see their mouths drop open, you could see their pencils fly; when the session was

over you could see them leap up as one body and rush wildly for the telephones.

This was the story as he told it: there was going to be a new spiritual leader born into the world. He was going to be miraculously begotten, he was going to be soul-guided throughout his life. He was to be trained and inspired to save the world. His mother to be was to be chosen by the hidden ones; *They* would give the sign. The fact of her virginity would be established by a corps of physicians, the most extraordinary corps ever assembled, consisting entirely of mature and highly-respected women physicians. They would make the examination and give a signed certificate which would be published to the whole world, and from the moment of the choice, the chosen virgin would never be alone for one instant. There would be two physicians always present, and also two nurses. In relays they would guard the precious person night and day, making a report every twenty-four hours and pledging their good faith in the most important scientific experiment ever attempted.

"There have been virgin births all through history," said Didymus, "or at any rate hundreds of millions of human beings have believed in them. Now, once for all, we are going to determine whether it is possible or not. The higher powers have promised to cause a virgin to conceive, and *They* will announce when the event has occurred. The future mother will be guarded from the time of the preliminary examination until the actual birth takes place, so that there can never be any doubt of the spiritual parentage of the man child."

"Suppose it should be a girl?" came the question, and there was an irreverent titter. Didymus answered

that he had the assurance of the highest authority that it would be a man child. Then he was asked about the possibility of artificial insemination, and answered: "Of course there is such a possibility, and that is why there will always be two physicians present and also two nurses. The committee of physicians will choose their own relays and have full charge of the experiment. It will be up to them to see the conditions and to guarantee to the world that the experiment has been conducted in good faith. I will invite the medical societies of various states to select women doctors in whom they have faith. Each of these doctors will be paid ten thousand dollars for their service in the experiment and each of the nurses will be paid five thousand."

The reporters bolted to the telephone and the news went out to the world. Millions of people thought it was a blasphemous horror, and other millions thought it was a hilarious joke, but everybody agreed in wanting to read about it, and no one would have to be paid to publish the details.

What were to be the qualifications of this virgin mother? Didymus announced that they had nothing to do with race, colour, social position, or physical beauty; they were integrity of character, intelligence, and a reverence for life. Rather vague terms, but the decision was not to be made by human fallibility; it would be made by the higher wisdom. Let those who felt the call present themselves, and the answer would be quick and final.

4

So came the cyclone heaped on top of the hurricane. Sick people were importunate, but comparatively feeble; autograph hunters shrieked and screamed, but their clamour did not last long; it was as nothing compared to the implacable frenzy of the mothers of virgins. In Hollywood alone there were ten thousand, all of whom had brought their precious darlings with a firm intention of having them made into Greta Garbos or Rita Hayworths. They all heard the story over the radio, or read it in the morning paper, and they brought their darlings to the Temple well before the hour of opening and formed a line extending all the way around the block. Many girls came alone, and many brought lunch boxes indicating that they were prepared to stay.

The procedure was simple. In the lobby was a desk, and at it sat a woman secretary. She took down names and addresses, and as she wrote she pronounced each name aloud. At a nearby table I sat before the massive volume of Gerald Massey's *Ancient Egypt*. All I had to do was to keep my eye on it to see if it moved. It was a tedious job, but I had been asked to do it because I could be trusted, and I had to show my appreciation of the honour.

The procedure was called "registration", and many of the mothers were dissatisfied with it. They wanted to see the prophet, or they wanted to see someone in authority. Instead they were just asked to register and were then turned away without the consideration which

their dignity required. Some of them expressed irritation, and one didn't help herself by saying: "It's a goddam swindle!"

What happened was, I sat there all morning and the massive Massey did not move. I adjourned for a half hour and went to have a sandwich and a malted milk at a nearby drugstore; then I came back and sat all afternoon listening to the spelling out of names of all nationalities—but there was no sign of movement. At half-past five the proceedings were adjourned until the next day, and early next morning there was a double line around the block and everybody watching with hawk eyes to make sure that nobody slipped from line two into line one. Mothers and daughters had arrived from all over the Southwest, and many had come by plane from the rest of the country. Many begged for information, or at least a hint. They were short of money, and how long were they expected to wait? When would the actual judging begin?

It was cruel to keep silent, but what could we do? I could see no end to the procedure, and I went in to Didymus and suggested that he print little slips so that one could be given to each of the candidates, stating that the decision would be miraculously made and the candidate would be notified if the choice fell upon her. "Good idea," said my prophet friend. He spoke to one of the secretaries and the job was rushed; in a couple of hours there were the slips. They satisfied few, but at any rate they were better than a dead silence.

Two days of it was all that I could stand, and I told Didymus. There was no chance of cheating for the reason that if and when the book moved, he could check the report and make sure for himself. He had chosen

“sub-teachers” now, persons who were pledged to follow him to the end, and who apparently had the necessary “reverence for life.” He appointed one of these to take my place and keep watch. The procedure went on for a week without result, and Didymus took the precaution to ask the book whether it should be continued. The answer was Yes.

CHAPTER SEVEN

I

ALL this time the prophet was working incessantly. There were healing meetings every night, with the inevitable mob scenes and hysterias; all day, with only brief respites for food, he interviewed candidates, laid down rules, dictated letters, called for money and spent it, and in general carried on the presidency of an enormous business enterprise. All the time he had what he called "guidance" and he never had any doubt as to its authority. He chose missionaries and sent them out to the far corners of the earth, provided with funds and printed instructions. He promised

them his healing powers, and if they needed foreign languages he would give them "the gift of tongues." He held press conferences twice a week and gave the world new wonders to marvel at. He was founding a religion, but he refrained from calling it that, so as not to give offence to the old ones; he said he had not come to replace, but confirm. "Revelation is a continuing process," he declared, "and I am nothing but a herald of what is to come."

I wondered if his health would stand it, and suggested the question now and then. He remained his cheerful and smiling self and said he was being taken care of. But the time came when he decided that he must have more opportunity to think. "The world tries to tie up creative minds in red tape and routine," he said, "and I must not let that happen to me." He was trying out a way of getting the doctors to appoint the necessary committees. Doctors are of necessity more aware of the body than of the mind, and they hardly have time to think at all. They would have had to be more than human if they had not been somewhat dubious about the idea of wholesale healings, free of charge.

Didymus asked where we could go, and I tried to think of a place where we could escape attention. He would take off his robe, of course; but that would not suffice, because his picture had become as familiar as that of Harry Truman or Winston Churchill. He would be recognized and the mobs would swarm after him.

I thought of the beaches I had visited; I thought of the canyons and the mountain lakes. Best of all seemed the desert, and he was attracted by that, as many prophets before him had been. I remembered a little

village which had a couple of cottages standing far off by the side of a bare brown mountain. How they had come to be there I did not know; I had seen them only from a distance. I thought they might be unoccupied, since it was early autumn and still hot in the California deserts. Didymus said he wouldn't mind it; he would go back to nature in a pair of bathing trunks and sandals. I reminded him of tarantulas and scorpions, centipedes and rattlesnakes, but he declared that none of these had any power over him.

2

The prophet took off his robe and put on a polo shirt and light linen trousers. We packed two suitcases and had ourselves smuggled down in the service elevator of the hotel. I took him in my car, and with the help of the police we made our escape. We drove eastward out of the city, through a pass and across a broad valley, then winding through another canyon into the Mojave desert. No rain had fallen here for several months. The little plants had borne their flowers and produced their seeds; the wind had scattered them; the dust storms had covered them, and they lay waiting for the first winter rain. The larger plants had developed tough skins, prickly or sticky, and kept their moisture deep within. The cactus grew tall and grotesque in shape, and the only other trees were the thin-leaved feathery tamarisks.

The sun blazed hot and we took off our coats and opened all the windows of the car. A marvellous sense of

freedom we had, escaping the crowds, the traffic, and the smog which war-born industry was making twenty-four hours a day all over the sprawling city. It seldom came here because it was heavier than air and did not get over the mountains. There was not a cloud in the sky, and the temperature was well over a hundred, but we did not mind it because the air was dry and the car made a breeze.

Ahead of us was the chain of bare brown mountains. They looked very close, but it was a long drive. A ribbon of concrete led us on, and I studied a map and presently came to a side road and a sign reading "Horeb 3 miles". We turned off and came to a tiny village nestled in the curve of the mountains. We drove through it, and a mile or so away, I spied the two houses which I remembered. They were low and made of unpainted redwood, the same colour as the background, so they were inconspicuous.

For fear of being recognized we did not ask the way; in these days of television and the wide distribution of newspapers everybody knows the faces of the celebrities. We had some trouble in finding the unpaved road which led across the valley, and after a couple of false starts we had the wit to follow the poles which carried electric light—but no telephone—to the houses.

They were larger than they appeared. The first we came to was well built, one-story, with a sun deck on top. There was a knocker on the door, and we sounded it briskly, but there was no response. We could look through a window and see a furnished livingroom. We went on to the other house, a hundred yards further, and this proved to be one of the queerest constructions I had ever set eyes on. It had one sharply sloping roof

that went up to no apparent purpose high in the air. It was hard to be sure just where the building began or where the front door was, if any. It seems natural to assume that every building has some purpose, but what could be the purpose of this one was beyond my mind. Some kind of arty-art stuff, was my thought; for California redwood is expensive, and leaving it unpainted is not a matter of economy but of elegance.

There was no sign of life, and I judged that this, too, must be unoccupied. But I got out and found a door, well hidden in a sort of tunnel. I went in and knocked several times and waited. Then I heard the voice of a woman outside—she had come around from the back. I came out of the tunnel and found that Didymus had got out of the car—he must have got out quickly when he saw this sight.

3

She was sixteen or seventeen, I guessed, a country girl wearing those blue things called levis, rather short, as if they had been purchased when she was younger, showing short socks and tennis shoes, known as sneakers. Her brown hair was in two braids hanging down her back. She had a bright intelligent face with clear brown eyes and regular features; a simple girl with no make-up and a straightforward manner. I noticed that she had a trace of Southern accent, but men in this part of the world don't pay much attention to that, because Hollywood is nearby; it has become a fad and they put it on too thick.

Didymus said: "We are looking for a house to rent, and could you tell us about the one over there?"

"It is not for rent," she replied, "but it is for sale."

"Do you know the price?" he asked, and the answer was "Thirteen thousand. It cost more than that."

"Does that include the furniture?" he asked, and she told him "Yes." He asked who owned it, and she said, "My grandmother," and added that the grandmother was inside.

"I will buy it," he announced, just like that. I was surprised, but the girl showed no emotion. She was evidently a self-contained person.

"Don't you want to see it first?" she asked, mildly. He told her, "No, I looked through the window and saw enough. I assume there is a bathroom and a kitchen."

"Oh, yes," she answered, "there are all modern conveniences."

"All right," he said, "it's a deal. Can I see your grandmother?"

"She is old and not very well," was the reply, "but I will ask if she can see you." The girl went into the house.

I said, in a low voice: "Don't appear too eager, they may raise the price on you."

"I will pay the price," he answered. "The house is just what we want, and I think the girl is what we want also."

"How do you mean?" I demanded.

He said: "I think she will be the virgin mother. It came to me in a flash, and I believe it is a message. *They* have sent us here."

So I gave more attention to the girl when she came out. I had seen many paintings of virgin mothers, and could imagine her in the role. She was quiet, serene,

gentle in manner, and it was easy to believe that her face expressed both kindness and wisdom. "My grandmother will see you in a few minutes," she said, and added, "Her name is Mrs. Page. I am Aurelia Page."

"Pleased to meet you," said Didymus. "My name is Jenkins, and this is Mr. Smith."

"I am pleased to meet you," said Aurelia, sedately.

Didymus took charge of the conversation and I listened and watched them both. "You must have a lonely life out here," he said, and she answered: "My father is away. He will be back soon."

"Are you all alone here with your grandmother?" he asked, and when she answered "Yes," he said, "Aren't you afraid?"

"No," she told him, "nobody ever comes here. Besides, I have a gun and could use it if I had to." I reflected that I had never seen a gun in any painting of a virgin mother; but then I recalled that this was the wild and woolly West.

My prophet continued with his sociability. "This is an unusual house that you live in, Miss Page."

"Yes. It was quite famous for a time. It was built by the great architect Scampini."

"Oh, yes, I have heard of him," remarked Didymus. I doubted very much that he had; but I had. He was a man with an international reputation who had died only a few months ago. I had thought he was crazy, and now I was sure of it.

"It is what is called futuristic," said Aurelia, "but I don't know if the future will catch up with it. It was built when I was a child, so of course I am used to it. But it is inconvenient in many ways, and the roof is hard to repair. Fortunately it doesn't rain very often."

"Does the roof of the other house leak?" inquired Didymus.

"No, that's just a regular house that was built by my father because he didn't like this one. You may have heard of my mother, she was Lili Fazenda."

"Oh, yes, I know," said Didymus—and again I doubted if he did. Lili Fazenda had been one of the screen darlings of America when I was a small boy, and I knew the story and understood the situation in a flash. Lili had run away with an Indian Maharajah and disappeared from American view. Just recently I had read a reference to her as the rance of a province with so many syllables that I never could get them straight. What I didn't know, but learned later, was that Lili's husband, Waldo Emerson Page, had attempted to drown his sorrow and humiliation in drink. At this moment he was sitting dull-eyed and bleary in some Los Angeles beer parlour, and after a while he would beg the money and make his way home and have to be nursed and prayed back into normality for a brief period.

4

The old lady received us seated on a futuristic throne covered with an oriental rug. She must have been somewhere around seventy and had obviously made herself up in a hurry with a few smudges of paint and dabs of powder. She was clad in a robe of black satin with gold and green and scarlet hummingbirds embroidered upon it. I had no trouble in imagining that it had come

down from the days when she had been the mother-in-law of one of America's darlings; and now she was to be the grandmother of an immaculate virgin!

We were formally introduced and invited to seat ourselves in chairs that I was glad to see were not futuristic. I took a quick glance about, and noticed that there were bookshelves well filled, something that was not usual in California; I had been in many houses where there was not a single book nor a place for one.

We made a little polite conversation about the weather and the climate and the horrors of Los Angeles atmosphere from which we had escaped. Then the grand Mrs. Page remarked: "My granddaughter tells me that you wish to buy my guest house. I have been asking fourteen five, but since Aurelia has offered it for thirteen I will agree. You are prepared to pay cash?" Whereupon Didymus reached into his pocket and produced a bundle of those incredible treasury notes with the portrait of Grover Cleveland upon them. He counted out upon the table from one to thirteen and put the rest back into his pocket.

I ventured to intervene, "The custom, Jenkins," I said, "is to make a small deposit and put the matter into escrow in the bank."

"I don't see any bank around here," he said, "except banks of sand. My time is valuable, and I want Mrs. Page to see that I mean business. I assume that the property is free and clear of encumbrances."

"Entirely so," she said. "There are three acres of sand banks and there are also some hot mineral springs; considered valuable. The taxes are paid, and I assume they will be apportioned."

"Quite so," said Didymus-Jenkins. "My secretary

will write out the deed and drive you into the village where presumably it can be notarized. Let me explain that I am a writer and have come away to do some work, and the one thing I want is privacy."

"You can certainly have it here," said the grandmother. "We have a large enough supply of it."

"I will ask you and Miss Aurelia to do me the favour not to talk about our presence for a while. You have lived in the turmoil of Hollywood, I know, so you will appreciate my position."

"That is why I fled here with my family," said Mrs. Page. "And we will respect your wishes. My granddaughter and I live a very retired life, and you may be sure that we are the last persons in the world to gossip."

5

The girl found the old deed in a desk drawer and provided me with a sheet of paper. While the others made polite conversation I copied the legal verbiage. Ethelberta Page, a widow, acknowledged the receipt of thirteen thousand dollars, hereby surrendered all title and claim to the property—and I filled in the legal description. The purchaser was Alfred T. Jenkins, a single man, and I had my doubts about the legality of a sale to a non-existent person; I raised the objection later, and Didymus brushed it off, saying he would have Alfred T. Jenkins make out a quit-claim deed to Thomas Strawn, and he would record the two deeds at the same time. Apparently *They* had provided him with full information about these technicalities. He put the bills

back into his pocket, all but one which he handed to the old lady as evidence of good faith.

She gave us the keys, and while the ladies were dressing we walked over to inspect our new home. It was a quite elegant one-story house with two bedrooms, a bath, a kitchen, and plenty of closets. There was nothing futuristic about it; it was comfortable and clean, so we were content with our bargain.

The first thing the prophet did was to pick up a book and lay it on the centre table in the living-room. He hadn't brought the massive Massey, so he used a well-worn copy of *David Harum*, the first chapter of which, the horse-trading scene, had moved our grandfathers to nation-wide chuckles. Any book would serve, he said, and this was the great test. We both stood—it being a solemn occasion. In his special pontifical voice the prophet declared: "I order you to tell me whether this girl, Aurelia, will serve our world purpose." And instantly David Harum, the horse trader, went slowly up about a foot off the table and came slowly down. Three times this movement was repeated, and nothing could be more convincing.

"What does Aurelia mean?" asked Didymus, and I told him, "It means golden girl." He said, "It is a prophecy! I will bring it about that wherever she walks her footprints will turn to gold."

CHAPTER EIGHT

I

WE drove to the village of Horeb and found the only notary, who was also the only real estate agent. Before we got out of the car Didymus counted the twelve notes into the old lady's hand, saying that he didn't want the town gossips to know she had all this cash. "Hide it in your stocking," he said, and we men got out and looked the other way while she did it. Then Aurelia helped her out and she went in and signed the deed with a trembling hand.

While this was going on, I went to the village's only

grocery store and bought a supply of food and stored it in the trunk of the car. We wouldn't need any that day, because Mrs. Page had invited us to supper and the girl had cheerfully agreed to prepare it.

She was going to be kind to us, I perceived, and I could guess that an old lady who had been the mother of a motion-picture star would not be indifferent to the presence of a handsome young bachelor who had casually extracted a bundle of thousand-dollar bank notes from the pocket of his jacket.

After partaking of a simple but well-cooked supper I left the granddaughter and the bachelor seated under the portecochère, engaged in conversation. Two was company and three would have been a crowd, so the "secretary" took himself off to watch the fine sunset. Didymus had come here to think about how to find the right girl, and now that she had magically appeared, he had to think about her character and qualifications and how to approach her with his somewhat unusual proposal. So he told me, later in the evening, and I said, "Be careful that she doesn't fall in love with you." I added: "Or you with her." He answered gravely, "I shall not forget my mission."

He had decided that the girl had a very good mind. She had read all those books; she was one young American who had the time to read. "I talked to her about the loneliness of her life," he said. "It seemed a human subject and one that would give me a lead. She told me she went to the village and did the shopping and got the mail, of which they got little. They do not take a newspaper, so she hasn't seen our pictures. Once in a while they go to a movie, and they listen to the radio. She said my voice sounded strangely familiar,

and she wanted to know if I had ever spoken over the radio."

"When she hears it again she will know it," I ventured.

2

We discussed how he was to make himself known; but the problem solved itself. In the morning he went out for a stroll, and entirely by accident, of course, Aurelia came out at the same time and they strolled together. I watched them sitting on a flat rock in the warmth of the early morning sun. They sat for a long while and then they sought the shade of a tamarisk tree. At noon Didymus came over and said we were invited to lunch. He had had some talk with the grandmother, a worldly old lady, he reported, and obviously one who was sounding him out intently. "I think," he said, "she has an idea that we are gangsters hiding out with our loot. No doubt she has listened to hear if there is any mention of a holdup or burglary of a bank."

"And what about the girl?" I asked, not trying to hide my curiosity.

He reported that she was an admirable young person; she asked questions and listened to the answers, something which flatters a man. "I talked to her about the state of the world," he said, "and she agrees that it is bad. She asked a lot about Communism and what that means to the future? She asked more questions than I could answer."

"You haven't given her any hint of who you are?"

"I'm in no hurry. It may be she will guess it."

We had a simple luncheon of bacon and scrambled eggs, toast and a can of fruit. Then the grandmother took a nap, and it is the business of a secretary to have business of his own. I excused myself and went to our house and listened to our little radio set reporting that Didymus was missing and no one knew where he had gone; had he run out on the Wakeners? Then I settled myself in an armchair and read a book. Either the book wasn't interesting or the chair was too comfortable, for I fell asleep—I had been short on sleep for some time.

At sundown came Didymus again and reported that we were invited to supper. Apparently the two families were going to merge their housekeeping. He said this was really an amazing girl; she had a keen mind and delicate sensibilities—he was almost afraid to broach his terrible proposition to her. He hesitated even to tell her who he was; she had acquired a horror of Hollywood, because of what it had done to her mother. She had confessed to him about her father, and what Hollywood had done to him.

"Maybe that gives you a clue," I said. "Why not give an order to find the father, and help him out? Then she'll be prepared to hear your story."

"Maybe that is the answer," he said, "I'll sleep over it."

3

He wanted to put his mind on the problems of the Temple for a while, and we talked about those. He was learning a lot about human nature, and most of it wasn't good. Some of the people were incompetent, and

most of those who were competent were self-seeking; others were moved by vanity and wanted to have prominent positions and titles in the organization. They wanted to be seen on the platform, they wanted to get into the photographs and in front of the motion picture cameras. Some had to have money, and that was all right if they needed it and were rendering service, but many didn't try. The women quarrelled among themselves and made spiteful reports about one another. Those who had brought their daughters were the worst of all. They were positively ravenous and forced themselves upon him. Because they had joined the organization they thought they were entitled to special attention; but it was obvious that they had joined merely in order to have this claim.

"Whichever one I favour, I'm going to make a thousand enemies," he said. I told him it sounded exactly like politics, and he answered, "That is what it is."

He said that he was going to sleep over the problem of the virgin mother; but apparently the mystical powers were impatient. At any rate, this is what happened. We went for a brief stroll together and gazed up at the amazing spectacle of the stars in this desert atmosphere—you were almost moved to reach up your hands and touch them. We talked about their incredible distances, the quintillions and sextillions of miles; about their temperatures, their sizes, and what power could have brought them into existence and set them in their courses. With these high thoughts we went to bed, and in the middle of the night we were wakened by a banging upon the door of the house.

I started up first and put on my dressing gown and

ran to the door; there was Aurelia, calling: "Come, come! help!" I switched on the portecochère light and opened the door. The girl was sobbing with grief and fear. "Oh, Mr. Smith, grandmother is ill—something terrible, I fear; she is barely conscious. You must drive to the village and get the doctor."

I said: "All right, I will go." But Didymus came a few steps behind me, "Wait," he said; "there is no reason for fear. I will attend to it."

The girl started to protest, but he silenced her. "Stop worrying. I will help her."

He set out for the other house, we two following behind. All three of us were barefooted, but the path was smooth. Night is the time when the rattlesnakes of the desert are out hunting their prey, but none of us thought of that danger. Didymus led the way into the house and the girl signed him to the old lady's bedroom. She was lying on the bed, breathing hoarsely, her face grey and her eyes seeming to be rolled back. Yes, she was very sick; but Didymus didn't have to stop for diagnosis. He just took his stand in the middle of the room, drew himself to his full height, stared into nothingness and proclaimed in a firm voice: "I order that this woman shall be well. Let there be no delay."

We turned and saw that there was going to be only a few seconds' delay. Gradually the colour came back into the grey face, the breathing calmed, and the eyes closed normally. "Now it is all right," he said to the girl. "You have nothing to worry about."

Aurelia had been gazing at her grandmother; now she gazed at him. "Oh! you are *that* man," she exclaimed, her voice almost a whisper.

"Yes, I am that one," he admitted.

"I knew that I had heard your voice, but I couldn't place it. How can I ever thank you?"

"You don't have to thank me. It is what I have been sent for."

"Oh, I can never repay you!" she exclaimed.

He answered: "You can repay me, and I will show you the way; but not tonight. You should sleep, and your grandmother should sleep, and tomorrow we will have a talk. Be sure that nothing in this world is accidental."

So we took our departure; and walking back along the desert path he said: "You see how *They* have their way!"

It had become his religion; and who was I to contradict him?

4

Next morning we went over to breakfast. We had agreed to become regular boarders, paying our way. Aurelia insisted that it was no extra trouble to prepare twice the amount of food. I had insisted that it was the part of a gentleman to wash the dishes; so we were getting along very nicely.

The old lady had her breakfast in bed. She said that she was all right, and apparently did not even remember that she had been ill. After the domestic chores had been finished, she seated herself upon her chromium throne in her living room and Aurelia sat beside her and held her hand—the girl had surely not forgotten the terror of the night and didn't intend to. Didymus took a chair in front of them, and I sat on a couch off at

the side. I knew exactly what was coming and I didn't relish it.

"I will now tell you about my mission," he announced, "and I will tell what two ladies can do to assist me. You have perhaps heard over the radio about my project for a virgin-born teacher to redeem the world."

"We heard about it," said the older woman.

"And what did you think of it?" he inquired.

It was the granddaughter who responded. "I thought it was a horrid idea."

"Many think that," he responded, quietly. "But the facts of human life, its generation, its continuance, have been ordained for us, and we are powerless to change them. An immaculate conception is so named because it is clean and inoffensive."

"That is not the point," said this young woman who knew her own mind so well. "It is because other people's minds are nasty, and it will just set them to gossiping. They will never believe that it really happened; the whole world will be speculating about it, and the nastiness of their minds will be increased."

"The nastiness of their minds is what we have to cure," said the prophet. "The whole history of the past proves that they will accept the guidance of a heaven-born teacher. It will be proved to them overwhelmingly that it is a true miracle and an authentic revelation. How does it seem to you, Mrs. Page? A horrid idea?"

"I have lived in Hollywood for many years, Mr. Didymus," was the old lady's reply. "I am familiar with all the ideas there. I moved to the desert to get away from them."

"I shall be sorry indeed to take you back," he said,

“but it is written in the book of your fate. Your granddaughter has been chosen to become the virgin mother of the future teacher of the world.”

“*Me?*” cried Aurelia—it was almost a scream. “Never! *Never!*”

“The word has been given, my dear. I have asked the question again and again, and *They* have answered. You are the chosen virgin.”

“They have no power over me, and I will pay no attention to them. I won’t do it!”

“Stop and think about it, I beg you. You will have no discomfort and no shame. You will bear a man child with no pain. You will watch him grow in wisdom and stature, you will be amazed at his powers, at his beauty and charm. You will be the most envied mother in the world. You will have every comfort, everything that you ask for—but you will ask only for what is right and good. You will be dowered with wisdom as well as with grace; you will be happy beyond any happiness you can imagine. And that will be but a small matter compared with what you will know, that you are the means of putting an end to the misery and torment of the world, to the cruel and devastating wars, to all the horrors that torment mankind. You cannot realize it all at once because your mind is young and unformed, and this invitation is beyond all thinking. Think of the best things you can, and they will be but a few drops out of an infinite ocean of joy and grace. The murmurs of doubt and hatred will die away; they will be like the shades of night when the sun comes up above the rim of this desert. It comes up white and glowing, big beyond imagining, pure beyond all your dreams—and it belongs to those who are guiding you, who are your

teachers and friends. The miracles I have done are but little things, trifles to impress the weak minds of the populace; but you will see wonders of the spirit beyond these. I will begin with the simple things, and I will increase them as your understanding makes possible."

He stood up and said: "I order a levitation." And straightway he went up with slow dignity to the ceiling of the room. There he took out his fountain pen and made a cross mark on the blue-tinted surface. "It is an idea that I learned from the medium Home," he said, motionless up there in the air. "Whenever you enter this room you will be moved to look up and see it. It will be a constant reminder of me, and of the call which is being made upon you, not by me but by those powers who guide me, and who have chosen you for their own."

Then he came down, and when he was standing on the solid floor again, he said: "If you have any doubt in your mind, go up and look at it." He commanded a levitation for the girl, and sure enough, up she went, levis and all. She looked at the mark up there close to the ceiling. "You see it?" he inquired, with one of his friendly smiles, and only when she answered did he let her down again.

5

"Sit down, Aurelia," he said, "I want to talk to you seriously now,"—as if what he said so far had been just in play. "Understand, this is a test of your mind and spirit. It is one which has been ordered. I want you to think carefully and tell me. Suppose I were to say that you can have anything in this world that you want,

what is it you would choose? Remember that you may get it, so be careful what you say."

She sat and thought, and all three of us watched her. She had her hands twisted together, and we could see her nervousness in the movement of her fingers. Then she clasped them tightly, and he guessed that she had decided. "All right," he said, "are you ready to tell me?"

She answered: "Yes. I would like to have my father made well and cured of his weakness."

"All right," he told her. "That is what I expected, and it can easily be done. Where is your father?"

The answer was, "I cannot say. Sooner or later he always comes back, but he may not come again. He may be dead for all we know."

"I will order that he shall come to you. We will go to Los Angeles and wait there. Perhaps he will come to the Temple in search of healing. I do not know how *They* will arrange it—any more than I know how *They* brought me to this place to meet you. *They* do not speak to me; they leave it for me to ask questions and *They* answer. I will show you. Tell me your father's name."

She told him that her father's name was Waldo Emerson Page. "Put a book on the table," he said, "and sit and watch it closely." Then he spoke in his special hieratic voice: "I order you to tell me if you will find Waldo Emerson Page and bring him to his daughter." The book went slowly up about a foot in the air while Aurelia stared amazed, and when it was down again on the table Didymus spoke: "I order you to tell Aurelia Page if she has been chosen to become the virgin mother."

Again the book went up; and when it came down

Didymus commanded for a third time: "I order you to tell her, will you take care of her and protect her from all harm?" Again the levitation took place; and after the book was back on the table there wasn't a sound in the room. The seconds passed, and not one of us spoke; until at last the girl bowed her head and whispered, "I submit."

CHAPTER NINE

I

THE two women packed their suitcases and stowed them in the trunk of my car. We locked up the two houses, and I drove the party to Los Angeles and saw the ladies safely installed in a suite in our hotel. The crowds were gone and everything was lovely and quiet—for just a few hours, until the radio and the newspapers spread the word that Didymus had come back from his vacation in the desert. It is well known that prophets through all time made their homes in the desert, so it was picturesque and according to tradition,

and the radio and newspapers made the most of it. The crowds came swarming, the autograph hunters resumed their screaming, and the police formed their flying wedge once more.

It wasn't many hours before they had to form two flying wedges; for the prophet was so sure of his guidance that he held a press conference and announced that he had found the future virgin mother in the desert and had brought her to town with him. When he made that statement to the assembled reporters you could feel an excitement like the waves of an earthquake. "Who is she?" they asked, and could hardly wait long enough for the answer. There was, of course, no use trying to keep her identity secret, and when he said she was the daughter of the former motion picture star Lili Fazenda, who had eloped and married the Maharajah of the many syllables, several reporters jumped up and rushed out to the telephones, and only those who served morning newspapers stayed behind to ask the girl's name, where she was now, when could they get a picture of her, and when could they get her on the radio and television.

Poor Aurelia, child of the great open spaces, of the solitude and the silence, was suddenly seized as it were by one of those dust-devils of the Mojave, magnified a million times and become a cyclone. I was assigned to take care of her, and did the best I could. For the first few days I think she enjoyed it, for she was young and it was a novelty, something like Cinderella with her glass slipper or Aladdin with his wonderful lamp. She gazed at the sea of faces that surrounded her, she listened to the uproar, and had a hard time thinking that it was real. One question dominated all others in her mind—

her father, and where and when was she going to find him. Would his be among those faces? Would his voice be among those cries?

Of course it had to happen in the most conspicuous way—it seemed as if *They* were contriving it so. He showed up in that mob that was clamouring in the Temple for healing. He wasn't an old man, but he looked it. His face was grey and lined, his hair matted, his clothing dirty. He was a pitiable spectacle with trembling hands and bloodshot eyes. Aurelia always stood searching those crowds, and when she saw him she rushed to him crying, "Daddy! Daddy!"

The crowd gave way and fell silent; it was quite a drama. She led him to Didymus, and Didymus did his part. "Waldo Emerson Page," he commanded, "I order that you shall never again touch intoxicating liquor. If you take it between your lips you will spit it out. If you swallow it you will vomit and be sick with shame."

And of course that settled it. The crowd cheered and prayed, sang hymns and wept. The motion-picture camera ground, and the reporters scribbled in their notebooks and bolted out to the row of local telephones which had been provided for them. We took the unhappy father back to the hotel and got him a bath and a shave and a new outfit of clothing, and there he was, made well and rejuvenated. He became an adorer of Didymus and one of the elders of the Temple, and his daughter surrendered the last of her scruples and took to dancing and singing with all the other corybantes.

2

But this, alas, was not for long. Dark storm clouds were gathering over the Wakeners. We had many enemies, both inside and out, and their power was growing.

First of all were the churches. The most powerful church in the City of our Lady of the Angels declared war upon us. The archbishop preached a sermon in which he declared that our movement was evil and that its powers came from Satan; all true believers must oppose us by every means in their power. That meant not merely fanatics rising up in meetings and denouncing us; it meant scandals invented and circulated—for was not the devil the father of lies, and was it not an historical custom to fight him with his own fire? It meant the possibility of stink bombs, and even of mobs; it meant that the police might be less zealous in protecting us.

Also it meant a supernatural opposition, which I admit gave me a little shiver when I first heard about it. I went to the Temple early one morning with some work to do, and the night watchman on duty told me of a strange incident which had occurred. Not long after midnight an elderly gentleman had appeared, wearing some kind of black and white clerical robes, and told the watchman he wished to perform an act of worship in the Temple. The watchman had no specific orders, but was used to queer things in the place, so he thought it was all right to let the gentleman in and stand by and

watch him. Since the words he spoke were in a foreign language the watchman couldn't tell much about it. But the man had taken from a concealed pocket a little box with something in it and a little bottle of water, and he had scattered both lightly over the place, pronouncing meantime strange-sounding sentences in a loud commanding voice.

I realized what it was; a ceremony for the exorcizing of demons from the premises. I had curiosity enough to go to the Los Angeles Public Library and dig out an old volume in which this Latin service is to be found. The priest performing the ceremony calls the evil one all the foul names which were known to the Middle Ages, and there were many: enemy of the faith, foe of the human race, bringer of death, thief of life, denier of justice, root of evil, spreader of vices, seducer of men, betrayer of nations, exciter of envy, origin of avarice, cause of discord—and surely we had had enough of the last three! The exorcist bids him in the name of all the separate heavenly powers to go forth, to flee, to save himself, to abandon his evil efforts, to spare this place and the persons in it—and so on and on for half an hour of scolding, denunciation, rebuke and threats of dire punishment. All this in venerable Latin, of course: "*Exi ergo, impie, exi scelerate, exi cum omnia fallacia!*" In American: "*Vamoose, skidoo, drop dead!*"

Yes, I felt uneasy, and wondered if such an exorcism would possibly work; but when I told Didymus about it, he laughed and said: "Look!" He had himself levitated a few feet; that was in our hotel room, and I said: "Let's try it in the Temple." So the next time we were there—it was a committee meeting—the prophet suddenly surprised his leading supporters by popping

about ten feet into the air and then letting himself gently down. He told them the reason for the experiment, and they enjoyed a laugh. That evening he told the public meeting about it, acclaiming it as official and conclusive proof that his power did not come from Satan. You can imagine what the newspapers did with that.

3

The other churches were more dignified, but no less determined in their opposition. And, of course, many of the Temple members were, or had been, members of these churches, and respected their authority. Some withdrew and others stayed to criticize, whether openly or in secret.

And then the mothers! Several thousand had enrolled their virgin daughters, and many of these had joined the Temple in the hope of gaining favour. From the moment the choice of Aurelia was announced many of these mothers became enemies. They went about whispering objections to the choice; maybe the girl was what she claimed to be, maybe not; anyhow, it was obvious that she was undistinguished and unfitted for this high duty. It had been an arbitrary choice by Didymus, no matter how much he might try to put the responsibility upon the Teachers. Why should he, and he alone, make such a decision, and everybody else have to accept it? Surely there ought to be a committee of judges!

All kinds of cranks had joined the organization; all kinds of neurotic and unbalanced persons. There were

devotees of strange faiths from all over the world; of black magic and voodoo, and even of devil worship. All these dark cults were represented in the sprawling city, and they looked upon the Temple as a place where they might make headway and win followers.

And then, of course, there were the Communists, who never overlook any organization and who chose the Wakeners as their number-one target. They joined, made friends, and started their work of boring from within. They wouldn't say they were Communists, of course; they would be what in their own slang is known as "sleepers". They were friends of the poor and oppressed, believers in democracy, proletarians and clamourers for social justice. What was the reason this Temple had to be an autocracy, with one man having the say and the masses being led like dumb sheep? Why should one man have all the money, and the rest have only expenses doled out to them? Where did the money come from, and what were the secret organizations furnishing it? Certainly they were capitalistic and predatory, certainly they were expecting to get it back manifold. Didymus had it, and why shouldn't he be asked to distribute it among his needy followers? Why should he stay at a fashionable and expensive hotel while his followers lived in ramshackle tenements? Let there be an organization to voice these demands and enforce them! So before long there sprang up the United Temple Workers, and they presented a set of demands, and when these were refused they began picketing the building. There were disturbances and fights, and of course all this was exploited by the newspapers. We lived in a glass house with scores of reporters peering in day and night.

4

Most disappointing of all were the doctors. Greatly to the surprise of Didymus they refused to have anything to do with his proposed scientific experiment. They said it was nonsense, and vulgar nonsense. They said they were not interested in proofs of something that could not happen. The dignity of their profession forbade them to be used for the promoting of a sensational cult. Didymus had sent his invitation to the various state medical associations, but he got no replies—except through the newspapers. He learned that several had voted to forbid their members to have anything to do with the proposed experiment, under penalty of expulsion from their professional group.

So Didymus was forced to go shopping among the less reputable members of a noble profession. There were advertising doctors; there were some who performed illegal operations, there were young ones who were hard up and old ones who were discouraged and didn't care what they did. The large sums of money offered brought numbers, and Didymus tried them with the book and a few were accepted—presumably the best the Teachers could find. The first to come was a woman doctor named Ankerman, well advanced in years, and an odd character if I ever met one. She dressed in tailor-made clothing, as much like a man's as possible. She had her hair cut short and wore horn-rimmed spectacles and a severe expression. Being the first to be accepted, she considered herself the one in authority

and became bossy and aggressive. I got to know her well, and she wasn't a bad sort; she even came to love Aurelia in her own peculiar way and did everything she could to help the rest of us.

But she was a nervous and fidgety person, and her idea of helping was to collect all the gossip that was in circulation and bring it to Didymus and to me and to the girl—whichever ear she could get hold of. She told us about the intrigues and the scandals; she told us who were the spies and the enemies. If you listened to her—and how could you help it?—the place became a hell-hole, full of raging spites and base betrayals. She knew who the Communists were and all their tricks. She knew who was going off and trying to bring about the death of Didymus by making a wax image of him and sticking hatpins through it. She knew who was collecting the poison of scorpions and blackwidow spiders and putting it in his food by means of mental telekinesis. She knew who was whispering that Aurelia was not a virgin and claiming to be able to prove it.

5

The prophet of righteousness refused to let any of this trouble him; but it had a serious effect upon the dedicated girl. It destroyed her spontaneous joy in the institution and its doings. It gave her a view of human nature which she had entirely missed in the Mojave desert. She was afraid to tell her grandmother, because the grandmother was feeble and might have another

spell of illness. She was afraid to tell her father because he might have a fit of despair and go back to his drinking. So she came to me. She held me responsible for what Didymus did because I was older than he, and should have guided him and kept him from those courses which had awakened such furious opposition.

I had to repeat Lord Acton's statement about power and how it corrupts. I had to explain how human beings crave power more than anything else in this world, and how everything else is valued only because it contributes to the gaining of power over other human beings. I explained how the sudden acquisition of power affects people like an intoxicant, depriving them of all sense and judgment. There were some in this Temple who had never had anything—money, reputation, hope; now they had got a bit of all these, and we saw them swelling up like those puffers or balloon fish, which I have pulled up out of the sea. No one of them could seek to replace Didymus, because they couldn't do what he did; but each of them could hope to be nearest to him, to have the most influence upon him, to stand at his right hand. They tried to shove others out of the way and learned to hate them; they formed combinations against one another and carried on intrigues, and then accused the others of the very actions which they themselves were committing. The English poet Pope, himself the most bitter and jealous of men, had described that attitude—

View him with scornful, yet with jealous eyes,
And hate for arts that caused himself to rise.

As a lecture on what you might call the psychology of politics, all that was illuminating and sound; but it

brought little comfort to the grandmother, or to the girl who had dedicated herself to a scientific experiment, and discovered that it meant as it were being stripped naked before the whole world, and having obscene-minded people peering and poking at her and discussing her intimate secrets. She had said it would be horrid, but she had had no real conception of its detailed horridness and the prolonged misery of it. Didymus was taking a long time to get the doctors, and she didn't like those whom he got. And here came the little old lady, Dr. Ankerman, whispering dreadful suspicions, saying that she must not trust this one and that; they might be bribed by the enemy, they might give false testimony and ruin the whole experiment.

Think of all the money the enemy would offer them to do this dastardly thing! Think of all the money that would be available—church money, medical money, official science money! Was it not practically certain that some enemy would make the attempt? And what was this report about Didymus having been threatened by blackmailers who offered to prove that Aurelia was “a woman with a past”? I asked Didymus about this, and he laughed and said he hadn't heard it yet.

There were some who thought the little old woman was herself in the employ of the enemy; but I never believed that. She was just fussy and full of fears and thought it was her duty to bring everybody else to the same state. Virginity is a subject which has stirred the curiosity and awe of mankind all through the ages. The myth makers had been busy with it, and Didymus had chosen it for that reason. Now there was a supermyth in the making, and the subject was forced into the news-

papers and the air waves and the conversation of even the most prudish persons. All the world was talking about it, speculating about it, making jokes about it. Yes, it was horrid; but who could suggest a way to stop it?

CHAPTER TEN

I

THERE is sex and there is money, and it would be hard to say which is the more exciting. Didymus was spending money wholesale, and where did he get it? Everybody wanted to know and nobody could find out. Among those who wanted most ardently to know was the United States Secret Service, which has to protect the nation against counterfeiting. They had come to Didymus to question him, and he had smiled and asked them if it wasn't good money. They had to admit that it was, and then he smiled again and said

there was surely no law requiring a man to tell how he got his money; and it was up to them to find out.

We could be sure they would take up the challenge. Very soon the fact was known all over the Temple—there were Secret Service agents among us and everybody was gossiping about it and guessing. “I looked at John, John looked at me!” To say that a Temple member was a Secret Service agent was a term of abuse, almost as bad as saying that he was a Communist borer-from-within.

Secret Service agents themselves do not talk, but there was nothing to impose silence upon those whom they questioned. I learned that they were keeping a record of the serial numbers of all the money which Didymus deposited in banks or paid in large amounts. Sooner or later paper notes get worn out and come back to the Treasury for redemption, and of course all the serial numbers are noted before the stuff is destroyed. If Didymus or the “Teachers” were creating money, duplicates would show up; and then they would have something definite.

When I pointed this out to my friend, he replied, “Is it a crime to find money in your house and spend it? I can prove that I took it to the bank and the Sub-treasury reported that it was good, so why shouldn’t I spend it, and why shouldn’t I go on spending it? If there are duplicates, which lot is the genuine? Let them find that out! I will put some of the money in the pockets of all twelve of the jurors, I will put some under the black robe of the judge—and who will find me guilty?”

2

This man of faith would permit nothing to disturb him, absolutely nothing; he was being protected. He didn't worry when two of his elders got into a fist fight over questions of precedence; nor when one of the most active ladies brought suit against another, charging slander. He didn't worry when he engaged a dignified and elegant lady doctor from the Middle West and presently it was revealed that she had served a term in jail as an abortionist. It was the busy little Dr. Ankerman who dug up this circumstance; she got the evidence, and of course was greatly excited about it, and considered it her duty to go and tell Aurelia and warn her of the dangers in a situation like this.

Didymus was content to say that the woman had reformed; *They* would surely not have chosen her otherwise. But Aurelia became frantic; her eyes were red with weeping, and the Temple gossips did not fail to notice it. She did not come to me about it, but her grandmother came and told me what else Dr. Ankerman had disclosed. It was easy to deflower a virgin; any doctor, man or woman, could do it by the hand. The victim would know it was done, but would be powerless to prove it and it could never be remedied. Imagine the uproar if such an incident were to occur; imagine the laughter of a cynical world! The virgin mother would be ruined, and no one would ever take the Temple seriously again. Thus the little woman doctor, trembling with excess of conscientiousness.

I promised to talk to Didymus about it, and did so,

but I got only the stock answer: *They* were in charge, *They* had ordered the test, *They* would protect the virgin mother. "Peace. Be not afraid."

3

Aurelia came to me—not to talk about the awful, unspeakable obscenity, but to ask me what she hoped would seem a casual question. "Tell me, Harry—what-ever became of the ancient Didymus, the one in the legend?" I could guess without difficulty what was in her mind, her fears for Tom, and what the old legend might portend. But I could not refuse to answer.

"Like most of the apostles," I told her, "he met a tragic fate. He went into the realm of a king named Misdus and converted both the queen and her children. The king was infuriated, and four of his soldiers took Didymus up into a high mountain and ran him through with their swords. Then they threw him into a cave and left. As it happened, later on the king's son fell desperately ill and the distracted man thought that perhaps he was being punished for the murder. He sent his soldiers up to get one of the bones of the martyr, thinking that this might heal his son. The soldiers reported that there was no trace of the bones; the body had been carried away by followers of Didymus. So the king sent a second time, saying that even the dust on which the body had lain might have some of its holy properties. They brought down some of the dust, and this was put upon the body of the son and immediately he got well."

"That must have been a great satisfaction to the old Didymus," said the girl, in a tone full of bitterness. "I suppose our new Didymus would get the same kind of satisfaction."

I tried to comfort her, saying, "We have no kings in America and we do not make martyrs, especially not religious ones."

"No," she said, "but we have gangsters who kill for hire; and we have lunatics and fanatics—the Temple is full of them."

I couldn't deny that she was right; I had often had the same thoughts. "He has too much power," I replied. "The more power you have the more envy you awaken and the more enemies you make. You fear them, and have to take measures against them."

"Tom will take no measures," she answered; "He won't let me take them, or you, or anybody."

I was studying her face and I said, gently: "You are in love with him, Aurelia?"

Blood mounted to her throat and cheeks and her eyes dropped. Then as if with sudden resolve she looked at me again and said: "It is true."

"Why don't you tell him?" I asked.

"How can I tell him?—a woman." I assured her if all the women sat still and waited, the population of the earth would fall off rapidly. But she only said, "I couldn't do it."

"You might win him away from all this," I insisted. "You might even seduce him—for his good."

"I have thought of it; I have had wicked thoughts. But it wouldn't work. The Temple is his life and he would be miserable without it. He would never forgive me, and never forgive himself."

4

I had to leave it there, because I knew that what she said was true. I would have suggested that she take back her pledge and threaten to withdraw from the affair; but I knew that what held her was her father. If he lost faith in the healer, he might go back to drinking. As it was, he still believed in the healer, but not in the congregation. Waldo Page was too much a man of the world not to see the evils about him, the greeds, the jealousies, the petty self-seeking. He was doubting if the Wakeners wanted to be saved, really, or if they were worth saving. Only his faith in Didymus held him; and his daughter did not dare to voice her fears.

I was the only one she could come to; and she came often. "Are we really doing people any good, Harry?"—and I had to be honest with her. "There are many good people in the group," I would say, and point to those who were devoted and self-sacrificing. "Some of the healings are the result of hysteria and mass-excitement, but on the other hand many of them last—you surely see that."

"Sometimes I think the people are living in cloud castles, and the whole thing is going to fall in on them some day."

I couldn't help smiling over her mixed metaphor. "Clouds don't weigh much," I reminded her. "And the water that comes out of them nourishes the earth. I think the greater number of the people are happier than they were, wandering around, strangers in a great city and having few social ties."

But I couldn't cheer her up. "There's something wrong, very wrong," she insisted. "Tell me what it is. I have to face it."

I had to turn social philosopher. "For one thing, Tom got started in a great hurry. Social institutions have to have time to develop and mature. A mushroom can grow in a night, but an oak takes a hundred years. Administrators of large enterprises have to be trained; they have to be tested, and watched by somebody, all the time."

"Tom is so certain that *They* will do it all. But are *They* doing it right? I find myself asking, what does it mean? Is somebody playing a joke on us? Has somebody made a wager? Or what?"

"The question has been asked about the whole universe, Aurelia, and by some of the wisest men. There was an English philosopher, John Stuart Mill, who advanced the proposition that God could not be both omnipotent and benevolent. If he could not prevent evil from existing he was not omnipotent, and if he did not wish to he was not benevolent. I have never come upon a satisfactory answer to that proposition."

"Then, we are at the mercy of evil?"

"It seems to have been put up to us. We have the power to seek it out and destroy it. As well as I can figure it, that is our task."

"Oh, ~~we~~ know so little!" she exclaimed.

I told her that she was repeating the complaints of Dr. Faustus. "We have to seek the best good we know; and always we have to bear in mind that our judgment is fallible. Every creature wishes to survive, takes it for granted that it has a right to; yet it may be that from

the point of view of the race it is better for that creature to perish."

"My thoughts frighten me," said Aurelia. "I watch people being healed, and I think: I must not weaken their faith! But I have traitor ideas!"

"My dear girl," I answered, "if we were all perfect, we wouldn't need a religion."

"But we do need it, Harry! And what worries me is, have we got the right one?"

CHAPTER ELEVEN

CAUSES went on producing their effects in our movement; it is a way they have. I watched them, and found myself with what Aurelia called traitor ideas. Money was free among the Wakeners, and it was "easy come, easy go." If anybody wanted anything, ask Didymus, and if he was too busy, ask me to ask him. If we needed a building for our growing enterprises, or a playground for our too-many children, ask one of the business managers, ask anybody, and presently it would be purchased. Salesmen swarmed about the managers, and they were free with their ex-

pense accounts; why not? Prices were high, but money was plentiful; and if some salesman out of the kindness of his heart chose to present someone in authority with a television set, what harm would it do?

Such was the mood at the top of the organization; but at the bottom was a quite different one. There were a hundred times as many at the bottom as at the top, and nobody was presenting any of them with television sets, or automobiles, or cases of champagne. All that was presented to them was discontent, grumbles and complaints, rumours and scandals. That is what the Communists were there for; it is what they are in the world for, to spread discontent, to burrow and undermine every organization in "bourgeois" society. What do these so-called "leaders" care about us, the exploited, "the wretched of the earth"? They leave us to starve while they feast and fatten themselves. This Didymus, this jumped-up prophet, what does he really do for the common people? We've had time enough now to try him out. With a wave of his hand, or maybe a few spoken words, he could give everyone of us comfort and plenty; but does he do it? No, he lives in a swanky hotel, he and his alleged virgin, and expects us to be satisfied with dancing and shouting and singing of hymns that he picks out for us.

Envy is an emotion easy to share and to spread; and Communism, at any rate the Stalinist variety, is envy incarnate. We had many good and faithful souls who kept their pledges and laboured for the cause, but they were kept in perpetual turmoil by the grumblers and agitators. ("Agitprop" is the name of a Communist department—Agitation and Propaganda.) Both sides knew that I had access to the prophet and could put

things into his head, and they would come to me with their complaints, and if I refused to hear them I made enemies. They would accuse me of being cynical, of not believing in the cause, or caring about the rank and file.

Also the economic forces worked against us. We were spending huge sums of money in the city, and, more important yet, were bringing in swarms of new people, all with money to spend. The result was, goods were becoming scarce and prices kept rising. There was a lot of complaint, and when the reporters asked Didymus about it he replied, "Show me the American who is afraid of prosperity"—a classic utterance. "Let the merchants bring in goods from the rest of the country," he insisted, "and it will make prosperity for all." This was in line with the current economic thinking, and there were few who objected to their share of spreading inflation.

Apparently *They* were good Americans, too; the sky was the limit with *Them*. Large sums or small, the money came, and Didymus handed it over to the "Dispensing Department," and it was dispensed. And was the leader going to spend his time poring over accounts and checking vouchers? Of course not! He was busy sending out emissaries, and selecting new hymns—all kinds of "spiritual" labours. When the head of one of the departments was missing, and a lot of money with him, the prophet said "Too bad! He has cut himself off from grace." But when I suggested calling the attention of the police, he said an emphatic "No." It would cause trouble, and *They* would surely not approve. So a number of our administrators made note that they could help themselves to money and not even bother to move to Mexico.

2

But then came an event that could not be overlooked. There was one administrator, head of the accounting department, big, burly, loud-voiced and hail-fellow with everybody; I had instinctively disliked him, but he proved to be honest. He had business training, and insisted that accounts be kept, and rendered to him. That made him unpopular, and there was turmoil, and—since Didymus couldn't be induced to render a decision—there was a fist fight. A couple of weeks later, the man was found lying dead in Griffith Park. It was mysterious, for there was no mark upon him, and no trace of poison, no cause of death that the doctors could find.

Of course the rumour mongers got busy. The honest ones suspected the known crooks, and crooks replied by pointing to the honest ones. There were some who suggested that Didymus might have done it, because he didn't want to be bothered with honest men. I refused to say a word; but Aurelia came to me with a strange idea, pledging me to secrecy: might it not have been *They*? And when I asked, "Why would *They* have wanted to murder poor Jerriman?" her reply was, "Who knows what *They* would want? Somebody may be playing a hateful joke upon us." I was brought to realize the depth of her disillusionment.

For a long while the district attorney had been urged to "do something" about the scandals of the Temple, and this was the time. If there had been the slightest

evidence of murder he would doubtless have conducted the investigation in private, but as there wasn't, he decided to make a show of it and give himself a boost in the coming electoral campaign. He would satisfy his public once for all, ask all the questions they wanted asked, and give them the example of an efficient and conscientious public servant. So there was the largest hall in the county building, with radio and TV apparatus, and a swarm of newspapermen and photographers attending; and there was the prophet in the witness chair, being "grilled."

I was really pleased to see what a man of the world my ex-gardener had become. We had talked it over in advance and he had agreed with me that it must be taken with humour and good temper; he would play up to the district attorney and give him as good as he gave. So Didymus was bland and smiling, giving everybody a good time and obviously enjoying it himself. Of course he didn't know anything about a murder and didn't believe there was one; poor Jerriman had been overworking and his heart had given out. When asked if he had heard rumours of missing funds in his organization, the prophet replied that he heard rumours of many sorts every day; unfortunately he was not a businessman, and the best he could do was to appoint men who were recommended. "It appears, Mr. District Attorney, that not all the citizens of your county are honest."

And what did he propose to do about it? He would do his best, and would seek guidance. Whose guidance?—and evidently the official was hoping to get him to say something that the church-goers of Los Angeles would take to be blasphemous. But Thomas called

Didymus knew all about that trap. He had learned from the days of King Mischeus. He said that he hadn't the slightest idea who were those powers which guided him. They why did he trust them?—and he said, "Because of the people who have been helped and healed by them. There are thousands in your city—call them here and ask them."

He was asked about that messenger who had come to him. Did he say it was an angel? Didymus answered that it had looked like an angel and spoken like one, but hadn't said what it was. "I had no idea what to call him, Mr. District Attorney; I was a poor ignorant gardener, and the most unlikely person on earth to have a miracle happen to him." That sounded good over the TV, and convinced millions of people.

3

The official saw that he had to be polite. He pointed out the economic effects of the promiscuous distribution of paper money, and insisted that it was causing inflation in Los Angeles County. The prophet stuck firmly to the good American idea that he was promoting prosperity and that it was impossible to have too much of it. When the D.A. insisted that it amounted to counterfeiting, the prophet replied with dignity, "I have discussed that subject with the United States Secret Service, and if I had been doing anything unlawful they would certainly have told me. Surely there is no law against asking for money, and none against finding it. Have I any of your money, Mr. District Attorney?"

The other replied, "I hope not," and the prophet flashed back, "But you have some of mine."

"What do you mean by that?"

"I mean that you have one of my thousand-dollar bills; and what do you intend to do with it?"

"I don't know what you are talking about, young man."

"You will know, if you put your hand in your inside coat pocket."

The official obeyed, and took out one of those miraculous notes. The expression on his face must have looked wonderful on the TV screens of the land, and the roar of laughter from the crowd must have sounded the same. He flushed angrily and declared, "This is some silly prank. I never saw this money before."

"Of course not," said Didymus, "and neither have I seen what comes to me. Neither have your assistants seen what has appeared in their pockets." On each side of the D.A. sat an assistant, listening intently and occasionally scribbling a comment and passing it to the chief. There was another uproar as they reached into their pockets and pulled out their money.

The District Attorney was badly flustered; he wasn't sure that he would get votes by this kind of thing. He collected the notes and held them out to the witness. "Here. Take them."

"Oh, but they are not mine, sir. They are yours."

"They ~~are~~ not mine and I don't want them. Here."

"Well, if you insist," replied the prophet, and took the three notes. "Will one of you gentlemen kindly lend me a cigarette lighter?"

"You cannot smoke here," declared the official, sharply.

"I never smoke anywhere, sir. I consider it a bad habit; but if you have a lighter, please lend it."

The awful realization came to the inquisitor. "What do you propose to do, burn the notes?" and the answer was, "Of course. They are not mine and you say they are not yours. You claim they will cause inflation, so let us avoid it."

The storm of laughter almost broke up the show. The official knew that it would surely do him no good to sit and watch good money destroyed. He had a quick conference with his assistants, and when the laughter had died down he said, "Let us give the money to charity."

"I can't give it to anybody, because it isn't mine," insisted the tormentor. "But if *you* wish to give it to charity, that is all right with me."

"I will donate it to the Red Cross before the day is over," was the official's reply; and the rest of the inquisition was conducted with careful politeness.

4

This was a victory; but its effects did not last long; in fact it was soon working the wrong way. For the incident had made real to all the Wakeners the fact that Didymus could actually cause thousand-dollar bills to appear in people's pockets with the very slightest effort; and if he could cause three bills to appear, why not three thousand, or thirty thousand? It could only be because he didn't care to, and that meant that he didn't care about his humble followers. It was the same problem that

John Stuart Mill had raised—Didymus couldn't be both omnipotent and benevolent at the same time! Surely he must know how many of his faithful were poor, and even small sums would have been a boon to them; but he gave nothing but shouts and songs.

It afforded an opportunity for the Communists and other malcontents, and they were quick to seize it. We had a spy among them, not of our choosing but one who had appointed himself. When Didymus would not hear him he came to me, and when I showed no interest he went to Aurelia and poured the story out to her—so I got it, willy-nilly. There had been a secret meeting and a new organization had been formed. It wasn't "Red," oh, no—strictly "non-partisan," a people's movement, a "united front," confined solely to Temple members; it was spontaneous and unrehearsed, a workers' movement devoted to freedom and fair play.

They were calling themselves "The Quota Group", and what they wanted was an adequate return for their services to the cause. There had been animated discussion as to what their demand should be; most wanted the miracle they had seen on TV, thousand dollar bills to appear in their inside coat pockets—just as simple as that. But others said, Nonsense, if money could be created, why not other things, and do away with the much-talked-about inflation. Why not a two-bedroom house, with garage attached, for each member? Surely, if there are going to be miracles, it makes no difference whether they are little or big! If *They* can create the trillions of molecules which comprise a banknote, they can just as well produce the quadrillions or quintillions which comprise a house! At any rate, let's ask for it and see what happens.

After hours of wrangling there had been a compromise; the Group would ask for thousand dollar bills, but one for each member of the family. Surely nothing could be more reasonable than that; and surely, if Didymus really cared about the poor, he would do the favour cheerfully. They agreed that they would approach him respectfully, taking it for granted that he would say Yes; but the instigators of the movement winked at one another when they said it.

5

A petition was drawn up, and a committee asked permission to present it. Permission was granted, and Didymus sat and listened patiently to the reading. We knew what was coming, and had discussed the answer, which was a firm No. The Wakeners' was a spiritual movement, not a soup kitchen. "Those whom we employ," said the leader, "are paid good salaries. Our volunteer workers have their outside jobs, and live on what they earn. If people are sick, we heal them. If they are unemployed or otherwise in trouble, those are special cases that are dealt with by Miss Perkins." This was one of the leader's assistants, a conscientious lady who was hated by the "Agitprop"; she asked questions before she handed out money, and so they called her a "snooper."

The deputation announced that there would be trouble, and they proceeded to make it, by techniques they had been developing through the years. A strike of the volunteer workers was called and picket lines were

set up around the Temple. The reporters and photographers came, and the signs carried by the pickets appeared in newspapers all over the world: "Save the Starving! Our Children Cry! No Inflation in Our Pockets!"—and so on. A campaign began against the loyal workers, who persisted in crossing the picket lines. They were booed and jeered; and presently stones were being thrown through the windows of their homes and holes were being punched in the tires of their parked cars.

It was a war; a part of a universal war that had spread to every corner of the earth; a war that was guided by one policy, determined by one mind, in one headquarters. It was the class war. And it was carried on, not merely by clubs and brickbats and painted signs; it was carried on in newspaper columns, and over the radio, and in the halls of Congress; it was a war of words, of ideas. The Communists said it was a spontaneous uprising of the oppressed and suffering proletariat. "Workers of the world, unite; you have nothing to lose but your chains; you have a world to gain." The anti-Communists said it was a conspiracy, contrived and directed by the Kremlin. The anti-anti-Communists said that it was "witch hunting" to suggest that the Kremlin had anything to do with it, or indeed to say that the Communists had anything to do with anything.

After the fashion of wars, this one grew hotter and uglier. The strike leaders were determined to have it so. Rule or ruin! They were not content to boo those who passed the picket lines; they would crowd about and stop them by force. The police would intervene and be cursed; they would arrest the violent ones, and so make them into martyrs. Their pictures would be in the

papers, and it was glorious. Once a man had got arrested, he belonged to the cause; he had nowhere else to go.

The newspapermen were everywhere, looking for stories; there must be fresh sensations every day, and it was the business of the leaders to provide them. All the gossip of the Temple was raked up and turned into fact. When the governing board of the Temple voted to exclude the strikers from membership, the answer of the strikers was to charge that the dirty story of a proposed virgin birth was nothing but a publicity stunt; the alleged virgin was the prophet's mistress. The newspapers didn't quite dare to print that, but they hinted it, and the strikers put it on their picketing signs.

Tom was stubborn as a mule, and I think he would have stuck it out to the end, even if it meant his death. But in the Temple office Aurelia whispered to me, "This is the end, Harry. I've got to get out." And I said, "Me too!"

6

The way we got out of the Temple was with half a dozen police officers surrounding us. Of old they had been protecting us from our too-ardent friends, and now it was from howling enemies. A stone was thrown and knocked off the prophet's hat, and he didn't stoop to pick it up. We were taken to our hotel, from which the pickets had been kept away by a court injunction.

Tom shut himself in his room for a private session with his Teachers; and Aurelia came to me, and said, "I'm through. Right here! Right now!"

I answered: "Let's put our minds on it, and get Tom out also. Our Temple is doing more harm than good, and it is headed for a smash-up. These organized enemies are never going to let Tom succeed."

"They will make a martyr of him, Harry. And I fear that is what he wants."

"There is too much superstition in the world already, my dear, and we don't want to add to it. There is too much hatred, too much fanaticism. You and I ought to sit down and figure out some way to bring this movement to an end."

"I have racked my brains to think of a way. I have thought I would burn down the Temple; or I would poison some of these people who are filling it with hatred!"

"So you see how power works! Queens and would-be queens have been poisoning their rivals all through the ages. We must think of something better."

"You have to do it," she declared. "I can't."

"I have been thinking about the Teachers and what they are. They are intelligent beings; they hear you when they speak."

"They hear only Tom!"

"That is not possible. *They* know about other people, other relationships. *They* sent Tom to me and then to you. I don't know what I believe about religion, Aurelia. I swallowed the ideas of official science; I was interested in things that could be weighed and measured. But now I realize that there is mind in the universe; and there must be a source. I can't imagine it, but that doesn't make any difference. I say to myself, Can I believe that 'Hamlet' and 'Tristan' and the 'Fifth Symphony' came into existence by accident?"

And if I say that is impossible, can I believe that Shakespeare and Wagner and Beethoven came by accident? One idea is as absurd as the other. There must be a source of mind, and it may be that mind is everything. There is purpose in the universe; it seems to me our sense of purpose is one of the basic facts we have to deal with."

"What *is* our purpose, Harry?" she asked, with pleading in her voice.

"Our purpose right now is to get our friend out of this mess. Our purpose is to persuade those higher powers that it ought to be ended. We don't know who or what *They* are, but it is quite possible *They* might make a mistake and might realize it. Maybe *They* are trying an experiment and have had enough of it. Anyhow, it is our turn to experiment. Do you ever pray, Aurelia?"

"No," she said, promptly.

"Well, I have the idea we might try it. There must be some connection between our minds and the source which sustains us. All the saints have believed it and claimed to prove it. Many of the greatest minds in the world have believed it. The essence of prayer is concentration. Some call it suggestion, some call it auto-suggestion. Names do not matter, except in so far as they affect our own attitude. You perhaps have heard of the Frenchman who prayed, 'God, if there be a God, save my soul, if I have a soul.' That wouldn't be a very effective form of prayer."

"I am afraid it would be my form," admitted the girl.

"It would be better to remember the story of the man who came to Jesus and said: 'Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief.' Say that you are praying not merely for yourself but for the man you love. I propose that you go

to your room and pray, and I will go to mine and do the same. I propose that we persist in it day and night as long as we can stand it; that we keep our minds upon it and exclude everything else from our thoughts. I propose that we fight it out with those mysterious higher powers. We besiege *Them*; insist that the experiment has failed and the time has come to end it. We recite all the horrors we know and all the calamities we fear. We appeal in the name of their own righteousness; and we shut from our minds all hostile thoughts, all doubts and uncertainties. We tell ourselves that *They* exist, and are good, and have us in *Their* keeping. We tell ourselves that truth is mighty and it prevails."

I went on like this for quite a while, pouring out all the eloquence I could conjure up from my readings of "The Ten Great Religions." Whether I would ever prevail over the Teachers I could not know, but I did prevail over Aurelia. She agreed with me that she would make the test, and we shook hands on the bargain and went to our separate hotel rooms.

CHAPTER TWELVE

I

IT would be tedious even to summarize the prayers I said. They were largely a catalogue of the quarrelling I had witnessed in the Temple and the unpleasant discoveries about human nature I had made. I told it all to the Teachers and kept up a quiet clamour of insistence that *They* should act and save the new Didymus from the cruel and senseless fate of the old. The time for martyrdom was passed and what mankind needed now was intelligence. Let the Teachers give understanding to the world, and begin by giving it to me.

I stopped to eat but little, and I wore out my voice with even the murmur of prayers. I kept it up most of the night, and in the morning I listened to a five-minute news period, but did not hear that the Temple had burned down. Then I went to see Didymus in his room, and found him cheerful as usual, his mind full of instructions for his business manager and the various deputies. So I went back to my novel kind of work. I had read; To labour is to pray, and certainly I found that to pray was to labour.

At lunch time I saw my partner and found her tired and discouraged; but I managed to revive her enthusiasm and she promised to stick it out for the rest of the day and another night. I went back to my room and prayed, sometimes on my knees, sometimes walking up and down the room. Little devils of doubt assailed me, whispering, "This is all nonsense. What rubbish for a civilized man!" But I repeated the formula, "Get thee behind me, Satan"—*Retro me, Satanas!* I told myself that I was ignorant, but it was not my fault; I told myself that there was wisdom in the world greater than mine, there was power greater than mine, and I was appealing to it. I repeated the lines of Tennyson:

'Speak to him, thou, for he hears,
And spirit with spirit can meet—
Closer is he than breathing,
^ And nearer than hands and feet.

Another night, and I fell asleep at my orisons; I was ashamed of myself and reminded myself of the heroic saints who had prayed whole lifetimes and overcome any number of demons and devils, dragons, harpies, hydras, and what not. At noon I confessed to Aurelia

what had happened and asked her to help me. And, of course, like every good woman, she was anxious to take control, and did so. We both went back to our tasks and laboured faithfully all through the day; and in the middle of the evening there came a tap on my door, and it was Tom.

2

He must have heard my voice, for he asked, "What are you doing?" I told him I was rehearsing a speech—which I suppose was not too far from the truth, since the essence of prayer consists in saying the same things over and over and not getting bored.

I saw the depressed look on his face, and I surely didn't let him see anything else on mine. "Harry," he said, "something terrible has happened. The book doesn't move any more. I have asked a dozen questions over and over, but there is no response."

"How long have you been trying?" I asked.

"All day, off and on, and I can't imagine what is the matter."

"Perhaps *They* are asleep," I said.

"It has never happened before. *They* have always answered instantly."

"Try it now," I said, and pointed to a book that lay on my table. He took his stand in front of it and in his official voice commanded: "I order you to tell me whether another secretary should be hired." And the book lay still. "Try asking if you have done something wrong," I said. He put that question and again the

book stayed still. "Ask if *They* are willing to tell you what is wrong."

"I've already asked that," he said. "I've asked everything I can think of."

"Try again," I said; for I wanted to see it with my own eyes and hear it with my own ears. He tried half a dozen questions and there was no reply. "Have you tried levitating?" I inquired. He gave the order and stood in the middle of the floor, waiting. He waited a long time and then gave a jump—but he came right down again. It must have been humiliating.

"*They* have cast me off," he said, with a look of utter dejection upon his face; "and *They* won't even tell me why!"

"You have always assumed *They* were correct in everything," I replied. "But now surely you see that *They* were mistaken."

"I don't see it; I don't know what you mean."

"That virgin-birth business was a stupid blunder. You asked several times and *They* gave it their approval; but you must see now what a mess it has made."

"It has been the basis of all the old religions that have persuaded mankind—" he began the old formula.

"Yes, Tom,"—I went back to his real name now. "Those were naive peoples who just took the thing for granted. They did not ask questions and go into anatomical details. These times are more sophisticated; people do ask questions and they demand details."

I wanted to divert his mind, to get him to arguing—anything but brooding over his humiliation. "Those Teachers appeared to know everything," I persisted; "but you or I would appear to know everything to a pet dog. *They* may have powers vastly greater than ours and

still not be infinite or infallible. You haven't tried to guess what *They* are but I have been speculating all the time. *They* might be inhabitants of some other planet—of one that revolves around a nearby star—the nearest is only twenty-five trillion miles away."

"A likely thing indeed—that they could travel such distances back and forth!"

"If time and space are forms of our thought—and both the philosopher Kant and the physicist Einstein tell us that—then the inhabitants of Proxima Centauri may be with us always. Think of all the things such as blood cells and spermatozoa, the bacteria of disease and the nuclei of atoms—that were with us for a million years before we found them. It's a safe bet there are millions of other things that we haven't found yet."

3

But all this learning went over his head, which was bowed in utter dejection. "The fault was all mine," he insisted. "I was not equal to the job!"

"If ever I knew a man who worked faithfully at his job—"

"You don't know me, Harry. You don't know the evil that is in me. I lusted after a woman."

"You mean you committed an act that you are ashamed of?"

"No, but I had the desire—the dreadful thoughts—"

"There are very few young men who don't have such thoughts, Tom."

"Yes, but not for the virgin mother, the sacred one!"

I stared at him. "You mean you fell in love with Aurelia? Is that it?"

"I could not call it love. She was a dedicated person, and I was her spiritual guide."

I had a hard time restraining my impulse to laugh. I wanted to say: "You big loon!"—but I saw that would not do. It was a situation that called for tact. "I appreciate your feelings," I said, gently. "I think you acted nobly, and I honour you for it. I am sure you haven't anything to blame yourself for—except that you have been credulous and have trusted your Teachers too much. It is perfectly clear to me that *They* have made a blunder, and now have backed out and left you in the lurch. You have to bring yourself to face the facts about the Temple and what was happening there."

"Think of all those people I healed, Harry!"

"Yes, but you have never taken any statistics as to how many stayed healed. I met quite a number who found they were mistaken. It was just hysteria—the effect of emotion. I didn't tell you about it because I saw you were all wrapped up in the work, and I didn't want to weaken your faith. But I'll tell you now"—and I began with the stories of the gossip and the scandal, the back-biting, the jealousy and lust for power.

"What is the matter with human beings?" he asked, in desperation; and I told him they were only half-evolved from the animals, the carnivorous and predatory kinds; they were still "red in tooth and claw with ravin." I told him dreadful stories—for while he had been lost in his dream of glory I had been observing human nature in action. I had met good people as well as bad, but I told him about the bad, because I wanted to get him out of his involvement.

"What can I do about the Temple?" he asked, close to tears.

"What you can do," I said, "is to turn it over to the association and let them run it. Tell them you've done your part and now it's up to them."

"They can never do anything without me."

"That's not for you to say, but for them to try. The thing for you to do is to drop it like a hot potato. I didn't think you'd ever get out of it alive, but *They* are giving you a chance. Perhaps it was a kindness."

"And what would I do with myself?"

"That's easy! Let me take you and your girl and get you married."

"Married?" he echoed. "You mean you think Aurelia would marry me?"

At last I could afford to laugh. "Are you a man or a mouse? Go and ask her!"

"You mean—if I tell her I have lost my powers?" He gazed into my grinning face for a moment or two longer, and then got up and walked quickly out of the room.

He doesn't know to this day what I did. I stepped to the telephone and called Aurelia's room. I said: "He's coming, I think. He's in love with you, and all you have to do is to kiss him."

Later she told me how it was. He tapped on the door and came in and told her he was a ruined man; *They* had left him in the lurch, and he couldn't go on. He was so grieved that tears came into his eyes; and you know how that affects a good woman. She took my advice, and that's all there was to it. Except that the three of us joined in composing a brief letter to the congregation and its appointed leaders. Didymus told them he had done his part; he had given them all he could and must

now be on his way to his next duty. They would not see him again. They must follow the code, obey their leaders, and support the organization in every way in their power. "My blessings will be with you always. Farewell."

4

Aurelia's father drove the grandmother back home, and we young people made our escape with the help of the police. I drove eastward through the orange country and the blazing desert, a trip of some two hundred miles, and we crossed the Colorado river into the state of Arizona, where you can be married without licence or question. The justices of the peace and the preachers display a keen rivalry, putting out signs on their front lawns and even composing poetry to allure the couples who arrive at all hours of the day and night and in all stages of intoxication.

We preferred the "JP", as being more matter-of-fact. His office was in his home, a desk in the front parlour. He was gray-haired and his brown skin was like wrinkled leather; an old desert rat, he told us. He was brief and business-like. "Howdy, folks? You want to get married? Sure. Which is the man—don't make a mistake." It was a joke he must have used some hundreds of times.

His elderly wife came in, beaming professionally—she was the second witness and was paid for it. Tom gave the name of T. Judson Strawn, the middle name being that of his mother. Aurelia translated herself into Goldlady. Since TV had not reached this desert land,

we were not recognized. We paid double our legal fee and double the witness fee and crossed the bridge back into California.

5

I drove the happy couple to their home in the Mojave, and on the way we discussed our plans for the future. Since Tom had paid my hotel bills and other expenses, I had saved most of my salary. He had money in the bank—I refrained tactfully from asking how much. I thought he had earned it. He said that he was going to raise a family—in the normal and unsensational way; also he might develop the hot springs on the place. Tourists might remember him and come to see what he looked like.

I told him not to be sure of that—in America events were forgotten quickly. I quoted one of the old-time political bosses on the Bowery in New York who had said: “Dis is a nine-day town.” Hollywood I estimated to be a thirty-day town; one month you would be at the apex of success and the next month someone would say, “What! Is he still living?”

“What you ought to do,” I suggested, “is to write the story of your experience. That might keep it going for a year.”

“You forget,” he replied. “I don’t have the help of the Teachers any more.”

“Well, if you don’t think you can do it, suppose I do it and we go fifty-fifty.”

“Fine!” he said. “Maybe they would accept that as your thesis.”

"Never in this world," I told him. "A thesis is not permitted to be interesting; it must be dignified. But a newspaper syndicate might take it." Then I added: "I have a title in mind, 'What Didymus Did.' "

"Oh, good!" he exclaimed; and this is how this book came into existence.

I could have made it more exciting if it had not been for my academic training, which binds me to a scrupulous regard for facts. I have broken with some of the traditions; as you will see, there are no footnotes, no "ibids" and no "op. cit.s." I regret my inability to quote anything that *They* have to say about the matter, and if anybody gets in touch with them in the future I shall be happy to hear about it.

This applies also to the subject of levitation. There seem to be only a few cases of it in any generation, and I should be glad to learn about them. I have done a good deal of flying about in dreams, but have never been able to do it in my waking state. I did some investigating with a medium and saw a heavy table go up several feet into the air in moderately good light. But Tom has never been able to levitate again, and I have not met anyone else who claims to do it. I am watching for signs of it in a youngster now six months old who bears the name of Didymus Strawn, "Diddy" for short.

We three adults now look back upon our strange adventure, and discuss what conclusions can be drawn from it. We do not let it turn us into hopeless pessimists. We have brought ourselves to realize that human organisms have taken a long time to evolve, perhaps a million years, while civilizations have had only a few thousands. There is no use thinking they can be forced, or that they can make jumps. The people of Los

Angeles will have to go on breathing smog until they have learned to get rid of it, and the same applies to their moral smog. They may even have to go back to living in caves again, unless and until they have helped to establish a world government and learned to prevent atomic wars.

